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SADDLE AND SABRE.

BY

HAWLEY SMART.



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SADDLE AND SABRE.

I.—NORTH LEACH.

NESTLING at the foot of one of the long undulations of the Lincolnshire Wolds stood a large, many-gabled, irregular house, a house wont to puzzle the traveller as to what manner of man might be its owner. It was too big for a farmhouse, nor did it look in the least like a rectory; moreover, nothing stood near it but some three or four labourers' cottages. As you looked closer you became conscious that the central portion was most substantially built, and evidently of older date than the wings, which had apparently been added to it later. One peculiarity about it, rather striking in a house of this size, was that it was thatched, neatly and very trimly thatched, no doubt, but still that was a roof you would have hardly expected to find on a house of this class. North Leach, as the place was called, had been the home of the Devereux for certainly something like four centuries. There they had farmed some four hundred acres of their own so successfully that they had now for many years rented an adjoining farm of some seven or eight hundred acres, a property of the great territorial magnate of that part of Lincolnshire. This was farming on a large scale; but, although the times were not so prosperous for agriculturists as during the days of the tremendous struggle with Napoleon, still things were very flourishing. The farmers, albeit the Corn Laws had been repealed, made money hand over hand, and lived royally. Old Tom Devereux kept so many horses of one kind and another at North Leach, that gossip had it that Mrs. Devereux was always asked whether she would have four grays, browns, chestnuts, or what not for Doncaster races, a festival which the Devereux had attended with the utmost regularity for many years.

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The present generation of the family had been brought up in very different fashion from their predecessors. Both sons had been to Cambridge, while Lettice Devereux had had everything that masters and a fashionable school could do for her. As for riding, there never was a Devereux that could not ride. Both the men and women of the family were thoroughly at home in the saddle, and well-known as amongst the best and boldest riders with the Brocklesby. In front of the house, indeed, running round three sides of it, and just beyond the gardens and shrubberies which immediately surrounded it, was what was called "the paddock," a large grass field of about fifty acres, virgin turf which had never known the ploughshare. Along one side of it were various artificial fences, such as are used for schooling purposes; for the making of hunters was always being pursued at North Leach with great assiduity. Neither Tom Devereux nor his sons could be correctly designated horse-dealers, but when you have such a quantity of horses as were required for the work of a farm, to say nothing of a long string of hunters and carriage horses, it stands to reason that there must necessarily be a good deal of buying and selling connected with the establishment. Further, there were a few brood mares at North Leach, and, consequently, a certain amount of young stock, some of which usually had to be disposed of. There was one thing certain at the big farm, they could utilise horseflesh in a great number of ways, and if a horse gave no promise of making a hunter, there were many other paths in life to which he could be introduced.

Inside, the house was, as might be expected, a roomy, comfortable old building, which had been most judiciously modernised. In the central, or original house, so to speak, the rooms were low, with black oak panelling, and floors to match; but in the wings the rooms were far more lofty, and a very pleasant drawing-room in the one wing was balanced by an equally comfortable billiard-room on the other side of the hall.

At the time my story opens, John Devereux, the eldest son, had left the University some two years, and had steadily settled down as his father's partner: not but what

old Tom Devereux was a hale, hearty man of his years yet; but men do not, as a rule, ride quite so hard to hounds at sixty as they do in the days of their hot youth. We all learn to take our pleasures more soberly, and it is well for us, too, if we can take our work somewhat more leisurely. The overlooking of two such farms as North Leach and the adjacent one, held upon lease, involves a considerable amount of hard work, and Tom Devereux was well pleased when his son settled down to follow steadily in his footsteps. There had been times when he had somewhat doubted the wisdom of having allowed his sons to go to the University—at all events the eldest; he had been afraid it might unsettle him, and give him a distaste for the calling of a yeoman farmer; and then the old man had thought solemnly of what was to become of the land if there was no one to take his place when he was gone. He was fond of the old acres that had come down to him through so many generations of Devereux. He had made his money out of the land, and respected it accordingly. Moreover, he was as honestly proud and fond of the old home of his family as any noble in the land could be of the stately mansion transmitted to him through a long line of ancestors.

A gray November day is closing in as Lettice Devereux enters the drawing-room, and promptly rings for tea. She is soon seated in a comfortable armchair in front of the glowing fire, in lazy enjoyment of that luxury. A sharp gallop with the hounds that morning has induced a pleasant langour, which now that she has changed her dress, she feels justified in indulging in. She is already half asleep, when the door opens abruptly, and her brother in well-splashed boots and well-stained pink enters the room.

“Hulloa, Lettice,” he exclaimed, “what became of you? You didn’t come to grief of any kind with the young one, did you? But I missed you just after that rattling burst we had in the morning; and though we were lucky enough to find an afternoon fox, who gave us a very decent run, I never caught sight of your habit again.”

“No, John,” rejoined the girl, laughing, “and I will tell you why. That four-year-old has the makings of as good

a hunter as we have got in the stable. He carried me beautifully, and made never a mistake at his fences all the morning. But when we trotted off to look for that second fox, he began to blunder a good deal. And the reason was obvious, the horse was tired; quite reason enough for taking him home. We all know nothing breaks the heart of a young one so much as asking him to go on when he is tired."

"Ah! you really think well of the young one then, do you?" said John Devereux with evident interest, as he sipped his tea.

"I do," replied Lettice, "and what is more, I have an idea that he has a great turn of speed. I think it would be quite worth your while at the end of the hunting season to try him. I think you will find that he is rather above hunter class."

"We shall see," replied John. "Anyway your schooling will go a great way towards the completion of his education. Have you heard from Charlie, and when is he coming down?"

"Next week. Do you know anything of this Mr. Furzedon that he is bringing with him?"

"No. You see although Charlie and I certainly just were together at Cambridge, I was a good bit before his time. I was leaving just as he came up, and during the term or two we were there together, our sets were very different. As for this fellow, Furzedon, I never heard of him, but he is evidently a great pal of Charlie's; at all events he can ride a bit, and therefore we shall have no trouble about making him happy here, as long as the horses hold out; and if he wants a breather after partridges, goodness knows we've plenty of them, although it takes hard walking to pick up a few brace now."

"I've no doubt we can make it pleasant enough for Mr. Furzedon," rejoined Lettice. "I am bound to say that most of the friends you and Charlie ask here generally seem excessively pleased with the amusements we provide for them, and I have very little doubt Mr. Furzedon will fall into our grooves quite as naturally as the rest of them."

"Well, now I'm off," rejoined John Devereux, "to ex-

change my dirty boots, etc., for more civilised garments." And so saying, he left his sister to enjoy her second cup of tea, and indulge in dreamy reflection.

Miss Devereux was so far very well satisfied with her lot in life. A high-spirited girl of twenty, disposed to make the best of everything, she found her home life very enjoyable. There was always plenty to amuse her about the farm, and, although North Leach was rather an isolated residence, yet people in those parts had generally full stables, and made little of distances, and thought nothing of a ten or twelve mile drive to a country ball or other revel. Balls, it is true, were not very numerous; but then Lettice, though she could throw her heart and soul into a dance, was by no means hungry for such entertainments. As for the winter time, the prevalent feeling in those parts was, as Whyte Melville puts it, that "the business of life was to hunt every day;" and Lettice dearly loved a good gallop. As she sat lazily there in front of the fire, she was speculating a good deal on the return of her favourite brother. She was very fond of John, but his quiet, sedate manner did not accord with her own mirth-loving nature, like Charlie's. John was some six or seven years older than herself, but might have been, from the grave, serious way in which he took both his work and his pleasure, a score of years her senior. It was difficult to work John up to great enthusiasm about anything; his cool head never seemed to lose its balance for one moment; such high spirits as at times possessed herself and Charlie never ran away with John. She did not trouble her head very much about this Mr. Furzedon, although her brother had been very full of him during the last few months. Truth to tell, she was thinking more about how well her horse had carried her than anything else.

Seated in the sitting-room of a quiet lodging in Duke Street, smoking a short pipe, was a fair-haired, blue-eyed young fellow, gazing into the fire, and evidently deeply absorbed in thought. Thoughts not of the pleasantest, apparently, to judge from the knit brows and somewhat serious aspect of the young face.

"What an ass I have been," muttered Charlie Devereux

as he puffed savagely at his pipe. "I wish to Heaven I'd never let Furzedon persuade me to go to Newmarket. I have had a bet before, of course, but I never went regularly in for it till this time, and three such meetings as I've had are enough to break any one; indeed, if it hadn't been for Furzedon's help, I should have been unable to settle. Bad form, too, borrowing money from a pal, and as to paying him, there's only one thing for it. I must sell the hunters. It is rough, but as he is coming down to North Leach to hunt with me, I suppose he'll let me have two or three months of them before the sacrifice. However, even then, if I'm bid a good price I shall have to take it. I wonder whether they have anything at home they will let me have the riding of."

None knew better than Charlie that the big London dealers always had their eye upon North Leach. Many a letter did Tom Devereux get in the course of the season to know whether he had a hunter or two that he was disposed to part with. The dealers knew very well that when a horse from North Leach was guaranteed a made hunter, they could perfectly rely that it was so. And for an animal of that description a London dealer invariably has a market. There are plenty of his wealthy customers who would always sooner trust to his judgment than their own, and have no objection to pay the extra price.

"Well," thought Charlie with all the elasticity of youth, "it will be very jolly to have a real good gossip with Lettice, and to have a good time with the Brocklesbys. I never think hunting so good anywhere as it is in my 'ain countree.'" Here his reflections were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door, and the appearance of a tall dark young man with a florid countenance, and slightly Semitic nose.

"What, Charlie, all in the downs!" he said, "what nonsense! It is no use being down in your luck because you've had a facer; besides, it's all squared up now. Let's dine together, have a bottle of champagne, and then go off to the theatre. I've got all my business done in London, and am good now to go down to North Leach with you

whenever you like, and what's more we ought not to lose such beautifully open weather as this."

So the two dined at Limmer's, and the bottle of champagne, as was only natural, expanded into two, and then they adjourned to the Strand Theatre, and were convulsed with laughter at one of the burlesques which characterised those palmy days of the Strand. I am writing of a good many years ago, when night-houses existed in the Hay-market, and in pursuit of that very questionable experience, the seeing of life, it was deemed incumbent on the young men of the day to drop into two or three, before returning home. Inferior alcohol, and the most dubious company, male and female, was all the entertainment that these dens afforded, but then it was the proper thing to do, and in our younger days there are very few of us who do not deem that sufficient reason for the committal of any absurdity.

Furzedon and Charlie Devereux, of course, thought it necessary to have a lobster or some oysters at one of these houses, and as they sallied out after having their supper, a dilapidated man suddenly exclaimed: "Ah, Furzedon—I beg pardon, Mr. Furzedon—you're good I'm sure to stand a sovereign to an old pal who is down in his luck."

Furzedon's eyes gleamed dangerously in the gaslight for a moment as he retorted in stern measured tones, "I don't know who you are, but I do know that you'll get never a sixpence from me to-night."

"D'ye hear him, mates?" replied the dilapidated one, addressing some three or four similar birds of ill-omen, who were hanging about the entrance of the house in question. "Pretty conduct this to expect from a fellow who was your intimate friend, and for whom you did some tolerable dirty work no very short time ago."

"Shame, shame," cried the ragged chorus, "why don't you stand to the gentleman now he is down in his luck?" Keenly alive, these supporters of the sturdy mendicant, to the probability of "glasses round," should he succeed in extorting that sovereign from the "swell."

"Close up, Charlie," said Furzedon in a low voice. "These curs are going to rush us, and see what they can make of turning our pockets out. Just follow my lead. As

soon as that scoundrel comes up with his whining petition again, I shall let him have it hot. Hit out at once all you know, and we shall be through them, and into a hansom in less than two minutes. In the meantime do as I do." And Mr. Furzedon rapidly buttoned his overcoat up tightly. Another moment, and the suppliant for relief advanced with an impudent leer, and said, "Come, Mr. Furzedon, we don't part like this. I'm not going to want a sovereign while your pockets are well lined."

"Ah! you think so," replied Furzedon, with a low laugh. "I told you you should get nothing from me to-night. I lied; you shall," and taking a step forward, Furzedon let go his left straight and true from the shoulder, and stretched the luckless mendicant well-nigh senseless on the pavement. There was a rapid rush of his companions, but the quick, straight, determined hitting of Furzedon and Charlie speedily dissipated that attempt at plunder, and in another minute the pair were driving rapidly home to their lodgings in Duke Street.

Nothing perhaps in the episode of a mere night row in the Haymarket to influence the destiny of anybody connected with this history, and yet it is these very small events that so often bear curiously upon our lives. Had Furzedon given the unfortunate outcast of the Haymarket a sovereign, instead of a blow, it would probably have made a considerable difference in the course of his life.

II.—MAJOR BRADDOCK'S DINNER.

THE strangers' room at the Thermopolium was very full, and there was much talk and laughter going on at the various little tables as the wine passed merrily round them; but, perhaps, from none did the laughter ripple more freely than from a round table in the middle of the room, around which half-a-dozen men were gathered, the guests of jolly Major Braddock. The Major was in his element; he was never more happy than when giving a little dinner; he

flattered himself that he knew how to do it, and, what was more to the point, he did. Looking at his rubicund face and portly figure, it was difficult how to imagine the Major a smart officer of Hussars, and yet, ten years before, when he finally doffed the pelisse, he was as good-looking a dragoon as ever wore sabretache.

But a man naturally a *bon vivant*, and who gives himself free licence in the matter of good living, and who is not given in any way to field sports, rapidly puts on weight after he has turned thirty. The Major was comfortably off, and when he sold out subsided at once into a man about town. The giving and partaking of little dinners entered prominently into the scheme of his life, and it was now well known that an invitation from Bob Braddock was not a thing to be lightly declined; nor, on the other hand, was he a man to whom an invitation was to be lightly issued. It was well known through Clubland that Bob Braddock's verdict on a dinner was unimpeachable, and there were some one or two of those monarchical institutions which he specially tabooed, saying that it was a positive insult to ask anything but a raw boy to partake of food within their gates while they kept such an atrocious cook.

"Ha—ha!" laughed the Major, and it was one of those mellow laughs which almost instinctively carried the hearers away with it. "What times those were! What constitutions we all had in those days, and, heaven help us, how shamefully ignorant we were on the subject of wine and cookery! Just you try that champagne, Norman. Here, waiter, get Mr. Slade a clean glass; don't be afraid of it; there's no gout in it, and even if there is, upon my soul it's worth risking an attack for."

Norman Slade, a dark, wiry little man, whose age defied all conjecture, filled his glass gravely, and, as he tasted it, said: "Yes, it's rare good stuff, but you ought to have laid the foundation of podagra pretty substantially by this time."

"Yes, it was the Exhibition year, and they wanted some cavalry just to show off before the big swells who came over to see Paxton's glass-house," continued the Major. "So they brigaded five regiments of light cavalry at Hounslow, and, you may guess, with all that going on in London,

that the way us young ones streamed up to town every day was a caution. Except the unhappy subaltern for the day, I should think there wasn't an officer left in any one of the regiments."

"And you were the fellows the rest of us were paying taxes to provide for."

"Of course you were," retorted the Major. "We looked well, were full of go, and did very well for ornamental purposes, which was all you wanted in those days. We didn't do so badly either in the Crimea as long as it lasted; the worst of it was we were so soon used up. However, they don't stand those sort of larks now; do they, Bertie!"

"Well," replied the young man addressed, "I don't think the authorities would stand some of the things you've been recounting."

Bertie Slade was nephew to both these gentlemen. Norman's brother had married a Miss Braddock, and hence the connection; and, different as the two men were, was, strange to say, an equal favourite with both of them. No greater contrast than the two brothers-in-law could be conceived. The one, open-hearted, full of jest and story, with the art of dining as the main pursuit of his life. The other, a quiet, self-contained, reticent man, whose passion was the Turf, with a dry, caustic wit of his own, who often dribbled out a thing that brought down the laugh of the smoking-room of the club to which he was affiliated. Capable, too, of biting sarcasm, if exasperated, and it was not very difficult to move Norman Slade's wrath.

"Just one more glass of claret," said the Major, "or a glass of Madeira if you prefer it, while I relate another reminiscence of those times. As I have said, we all trooped up to London pretty well every day. Well, in those days, there was a very famous supper-house just off the Haymarket, which was much frequented by the soldiers. Indeed, if ever Her Majesty's officers, to speak metaphorically, ever did rally around the old flag, it was that particular supper-house in '51. The precious institution has long since disappeared, but, about three in the morning in those days, you were sure to find fellows from Woolwich, men from Hounslow, all anxious to pick up

some one to share a hansom home. Indeed, as far as the Hounslow division, as they called us, went, we formed a perfect procession of hansoms; constantly ten or a dozen of them proceeding in file past Hyde Park Corner on their way to our quarters. Well, there was constantly considerable difference about the fares when we arrived at Hounslow. The cabbies invariably argued that they had waited a good bit for us, and then demanded an excessive tariff for the time at which we employed them. Now, remember the prize ring was by no means dead in England in those days, and most of us had more or less learnt to use our hands pretty smartly; a turn up or two with the cabman became at last quite an orthodox finish to an evening, and we seldom came home without a fare or two being referred to the arbitration of battle. No need to tell you that the London cabman is pretty wide awake, and, as our fellows invariably went on the double-or-quits system, the Hounslow lot were soon taken up by some pretty clever bruisers amongst them. Well, it was a bright June morning, about five o'clock, and the cabmen were in great feather; they had sent down that night a couple of semi-professionals, and two or three of our best men had been handsomely polished off. We'd a big empty barrack room, containing nothing but some empty wine-cases, where these little differences were adjusted. They were glove fights, you must remember, so that our fellows didn't get so dreadfully marked as you might suppose. It was all over, the successful cabmen had carried away their double fares, and were gone, when the attention of those who were left of us was suddenly called to Jerry Moclerce. I and one or two others recollected seeing him at the beginning of the scrimmage struggling with a small cabman in the corner, but we had all been too absorbed in the fight to take further note of his proceedings. Now he was sitting on a champagne-case mopping his brows with a cambric handkerchief, and exclaiming, in maudering tones, 'Oh, dear, what a time I've had of it! Do, for goodness' sake, get me a hammer and a few nails, some of you fellows.' 'What's the matter, Jerry?' we exclaimed; 'what's the matter, old man?' 'Oh, dear, what an evening

I've had,' in half-crying tones. 'What a trouble he has been to me; for heaven's sake get me a hammer and nails.' 'What do you want—what's the matter?' we cried. 'Oh, don't,' he cried, still half-weeping; 'oh, dear, what a time I've had. You never saw such a disagreeable little beggar.' 'What *do* you mean, Jerry—what is it?' 'The little beast,' he replied, in a broken voice; 'he wouldn't go into the case, though I told him I wanted to send him to my mother. It'll please the dear old lady. But I've got him in at last, thank goodness; do help me nail him down at once, the discontented little brute! I can feel him still wriggling about.' 'Do you mean to say,' we cried, 'that you've got a man in the case?' 'Got him in,' he returned, lugubriously, 'yes, and it has taken me the whole night to get him there. Now do, like good fellows, bring the nails and a direction card.' But here we thought it was high time to intervene. Jerry, who had retained a high state of maudlin drunkenness, was carried off to bed, earnestly requesting that the case might be sent by the first train in the morning to his mother. Of course, we deuced soon had the top off the case, and high time, for the small cabman inside was quite past making any further efforts on his own account. Indeed, it required the help of a doctor to bring him round, and a handsome solatium on Jerry's part to hush up the business. Poor Jerry! A shell at Balaklava, as I daresay some of you know, killed as good a fellow as ever crossed saddle. Now, gentlemen, come along, and we'll have a cigar and coffee downstairs."

"Well, Bertie, how's the regiment getting on? Still in its chronic state of difficulties as regards ways and means as of yore, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Gilbert Slade, laughing; "we still hold a ten-pound note in much veneration, but, fortunately, we are not tried quite so high at Aldershot as they were in the days of your Hounslow campaign. The powers that be don't stand such incessant running up to town—a restriction which, though unpleasant, keeps us afloat."

Gilbert Slade was a subaltern in his uncle's old corps, and, of course, amongst the seniors were several who had been in the regiment with him. Besides, the Major never

missed the annual dinner, and, indeed, had much to say to its management. They said at the Albion that Major Braddock was a very fastidious gentleman, but, as the *chef* added enthusiastically, "he is a judge, and it's quite a pleasure to cook for him." So that one way and another Major Braddock had never lost touch of his old regiment, and knew something about pretty well every officer in it.

"I suppose you'll be moving in the spring," he said, as he lit a big cigar.

"Yes," replied Gilbert; "it's our turn to move, and, I suppose, in April, we shall go to the Northern district; but where I don't exactly know—Manchester, I'm afraid."

"And why afraid?" rejoined Major Braddock. "Merchant princes, bless you, who know how the thing should be done. If you play your cards properly, you ought to manage to get your legs under the mahogany of all the best houses, and wind up by marrying a hundred thousand pounds. Don't tell me, sir! It's not often a young fellow gets such a chance so early in life. I can only say I regard it as sending the regiment to play by the waters of Pactolus, and it'll be a disgrace to the lot of you if you ever know want afterwards."

"All I know is that Manchester is not a popular quarter with the Dragoons generally," rejoined Gilbert, laughing. "However, it is by no means settled yet that that is our destination."

"Going on leave?" asked the Major, drily.

"Yes—am on leave, indeed, now, though I shall probably run back to Aldershot for a night to arrange one or two little matters that I left unsettled when I came away. Then I am going to stay for a little while with some friends in Nottinghamshire, where I am promised a few days with the Belvoir."

"Ah!" said the Major, "you'll have to look lively to hold your own with the Duke's. It's a rare country, and if you've the luck to throw in for good sport, you will find it will try the best horse in your stable to live with them."

And then the conversation became general, reverting to, amongst other things—as it was apt to do in those days—what a friend of mine used to call the great annual pro-

blem, namely, what was to win the forthcoming Derby, and about this there was, needless to say, much diversity of opinion. In these days men trouble their heads very much less concerning the solving of that riddle, and it is not until the race is near at hand that much interest is manifested about it.

Gilbert Slade was a shrewd observer, and he noticed that, whereas the Major and the other men had much to say about it, and expressed their opinions freely, pooh-poohing each other's judgment with much disdain, Norman Slade, who, as Gilbert well knew, had far more knowledge of the subject than all the others put together, smoked silently, and listened to all the talk with a somewhat derisive smile on his countenance. At last he was appealed to point blank to give them his views on the subject.

"Can't, my good fellow," replied Norman, drily; "I haven't got any views about it whatever. I simply say I don't know. If you consider my advice worth anything, it is merely that it is best let alone for the present."

"Well, Norman," said the Major, laughing, "we certainly can't be said to have got much out of you."

Slade simply shrugged his shoulders in reply, and turned the conversation. Those who knew Norman Slade were quite aware of two things: first, that you might as well try to extract information from an oyster about any coming turf events as from him; secondly, on the rare occasions when he did vouchsafe a hint, it was sure to be well worth following. Perhaps Gilbert had been benefited as much as any man from such hints; he was a great favourite with that somewhat sarcastic uncle of his, and he had the good sense never to trouble him with questions about these matters. Gilbert Slade had a very shrewd head on his shoulders. He was a popular man in his regiment, but there was a touch of his Uncle Norman's reticence about his character. He most assuredly did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, nor did he unbosom himself quite so readily to his chums as many men of his age do. So far, his life at present could not be said to have been eventful; he had knocked about with his regiment from one garrison-town to another for the last four years, had always plenty

of houses open to him in the leave-season, and enjoyed a run in London as much as most men.

"Curious," muttered Gilbert, as he strolled homewards, "the difference between these two uncles of mine. As far as giving me a dinner goes, or writing me a moderate cheque if I got into difficulties, I've no doubt the Major would stand to me like a man; but in a serious scrape I fancy Uncle Norman would be worth a dozen of him. Every one who knows him seems to think he might have done anything if he had taken the trouble to try, while as for the Major, my impression is that it is well for him his father left him very comfortably off. From all accounts he was a rattling good fellow, but a precious bad officer in the days of his soldiering. Ah! well, fortunately I need trouble neither of them for assistance." And then Gilbert began lazily to reflect on his coming visit to Nottinghamshire, and speculate upon how much fun he could get out of the couple of hunters that he was taking down with him. When he got back to Limmer's he strolled into the coffee-room. It was tolerably late by this time, for the smoking-conclave at the Thermopolium had been of some duration, and it had been late when they had sat down to dinner.

There were some half-dozen young fellows in the coffee-room, solacing themselves as "young gentlemen laden with care" are wont to do, according to the famous lyric.

"Thought I was in for a real row to-night, coming out of Bob Croft's," said one. "They were a queer lot who rushed two fellows in front of me; but, by Jove! they caught a brace of Tartars. I never saw men hit out straighter or cleaner; and as for the leader of the gang, he went down at once from a left-hander I should have been sorry to have caught, and his pals got thoroughly sick of the job in less than two minutes."

"What the deuce are you boring us with the account of a night-house row for? We've all seen it, and shall, doubtless, see it again before we've done. Bertie Slade, by Jove! What are you doing here?"

"Well, just now," said Gilbert, as he raised his hat,

smiling, "I was listening to your friend's account of the row which he witnessed in the Haymarket."

"Oh! there's nothing much in it, I dare say," replied the narrator, somewhat sulkily. "But Barton interfered, as he invariably does, just before I came to the point of the story. I never heard such a fearful malediction as that man hurled after the fellow who had struck him down when he picked himself up. I can't get the pale, blood-stained face out of my head. He evidently knew him, for he cursed him by name, and swore never to forget nor forgive him; vowed that his turn would come, and that then Ralph Furzedon might look to himself. Never heard the name before, and don't suppose any of you did."

The company shook their heads in ignorance, and Gilbert, who, at all events, considered care sufficiently dissipated for that evening, nodded "good-night."

III.—THROWN OUT.

MR. FURZEDON was a gentleman wise far beyond his years. What his antecedents were previous to his arrival at the University was a fact concerning which no one knew anything. He never alluded in the faintest way to his family. He seemed plentifully supplied with money, had avowedly not the slightest intention of taking a degree, and conformed to the rules of his college just sufficiently to prevent coming into serious collision with the authorities. He spent his money freely, but invariably with an object in view. However off-hand his invitations might seem, they were not so in reality; and never was a young man less given to spontaneous outbursts of that description. He was by no means proud of his progenitor, though he admitted the old gentleman had behaved excessively well in quitting this world when he, Ralph, was about sixteen years old, and leaving him very comfortably off. He had come up to the University with the object solely of forming a circle of acquaintance. The men he

was civil to were all such as he thought would prove useful to him in life. His father had acquired his riches by the simple process of money-lending, but Ralph Furzedon had no idea of continuing that business, profitable though it was. His ambition was to take a good social position, and college was to him a mere stepping-stone to that end. He was fairly popular, he went in for most of the games and diversions so much esteemed by the undergraduates, and, if he did not distinguish himself in any particular pursuit, still he was passably good at many things; not, perhaps, a very amiable character, if you knew him thoroughly, but he was much too clever to let the spots on the sun be seen. Young men are not usually suspicious, and very few of his companions had the slightest idea of the ingrained selfishness of the man's nature. It never occurred to them that the first view that anything presented to his mind was how it would affect him, Ralph Furzedon.

Charlie Devereux was a very popular man, and it suited Mr. Furzedon to become intimate with him on that account; then, again, young Devereux was an undoubtedly fine horseman. Mr. Furzedon, in his far-sighted sagacity, opined that in a few years Charlie might have blossomed into a crack gentleman rider. Furzedon was very fond of a small racing speculation, when, to use his own language, he saw his way, and he thought that his friend might turn out useful to him in this latter capacity later on. Furzedon had come up to the University late; he had begun life for himself at the age of eighteen, and it was only after knocking about London for a couple of years that he realized how very difficult it was for a young fellow to form eligible acquaintances. Friends, as they would term themselves, were easy enough to make by a young gentleman with a liberal command of money, but, shrewd beyond his years, Ralph Furzedon was not to be imposed upon by these Brummagem imitations. He aspired to mix with gentlemen, and he knew that the very best of the acquaintance he had made had only a doubtful status in that way. For instance, he saw no possibility of getting into a decent club, and that was a point that troubled him much. It

showed something for the determination of the man's character that, when he thoroughly awoke to this state of things, he made up his mind to submit to the restraints of the University solely to attain the end he had in view. Mr. Furzedon did not intend to honour the University much longer, but so far was very well satisfied at the results of his experiment.

Furzedon and Charlie Devereux duly carried out their programme, and arrived at North Leach. Once settled in their quarters and they lost no time in commencing the serious business of life. That is to say, hunting at every available opportunity. Charlie had come down rather late for breakfast one morning. He was a terrible sinner in that respect, and generally "stumped up" a cover hack in the course of the season.

"We can't wait for you, Charlie," said Lettice. "Remember we're riding our hunters, whilst you no doubt have sent on, and intend riding that luckless slave of yours."

"All right," rejoined Charlie, "you and Furzedon had better jog on. I shall overtake you before you get to Harrow Wood, I daresay."

Charlie, perhaps, lingered rather longer over his breakfast than he dreamt of; but certain it is when he turned off through a line of gates that led down to the wood he had seen nothing of Furzedon or his sister on his way. He looked at his watch, and saw that he was late; still he fancied that the hounds had not yet left the cover. He galloped rapidly on, and as he came to the next field, caught sight of a lady in difficulties at the gate on the far side. It had swung to, and her horse was too fidgety to allow her to open it. Again and again did she get it a little way open, and then her hunter, in his impatience to get on, twitched it out of her hand.

"Pray allow me to do that for you," exclaimed Charlie, as he raised his hat.

"Oh! thank you so much," rejoined the fair horsewoman, "Dandy is always troublesome at gates, but this morning he is behaving shamefully. You see he knows we are late, and is so dreadfully anxious to get on,"

By this time Charlie had got the gate open, and held it while his new acquaintance made her way through.

"'Twas so late," she said, gaily, as they cantered across the next field together, "that my husband declined to wait any longer for me. Husbands are capable of such things at times, and I daresay you will give the verdict against me on an occasion of this sort. But surely," she exclaimed, "we are not riding for the next gate."

"No," answered Charlie. "But I know every yard of this country by heart. If we slip through the gap at the top here, it is nothing of a jump, we shall find a similar place in the next fence, which will take us down to the top end of the cover. It's a great cut, and if I know anything about it, we haven't a minute to spare. Listen!" he exclaimed, as the full-throated chorus rang musically on their ears. "Those hounds will be away almost immediately, if they are not already." And Charlie pressed his hack to a gallop, and led the way at a pretty sharp pace in the direction he indicated.

As they cleared the fence there was a crash of canine tongues that was a revelation to a fox-hunter.

"They are away, by Jove!" cried Charlie, "and on the far side the cover, I am afraid. I will do my best for you, but they will take a deal of catching. As for me, I am clean out of it, unless by miraculous luck I happen to pick up my hunter at the cover-side. I've rather taken it out of my hack already, and, though good of his kind, he is hardly equal to catching hounds that have slipped you."

"Too true," exclaimed the lady, as they jumped into the field adjoining the cover; "they're gone, and apparently everybody else."

Charlie made no reply, but sat down and bustled his hack round the top of the cover, his fair companion keeping close at his heels; but when he got to the other side, and found nothing but a small group composed of a couple of gamekeepers in velveteens and half-a-dozen labourers, he realised that his prediction was only too fatally fulfilled. There was no sign of his hunter, and, worse still, no likelihood of his reaching the hounds. These, indeed, were already out of sight, and their vicinity only to be judged

by sundry red and black coats that bobbed over the fences from time to time. With difficulty Charlie suppressed a malediction on his own indolence, and then, glancing at his companion, wondered what view she would take of it.

"Ah!" she said, half laughing, half pouting, "we are fellows in affliction. It is aggravating to have lost a good gallop, and still more aggravating to know that we have only ourselves to blame for it. Yes," she continued, as laughter triumphed over petulance in her mood, "we are both victims of our own Sybaritism. We couldn't tear ourselves from our pillows this autumn morning, nor restrain our appetites at the breakfast-table. What are we to do?"

Charlie made no reply for some few minutes. "Lost a run," he thought, "missed my hunter, and have got a strange demoiselle thrown on my hands, whom I have no idea what to do with."

"Catching them," he answered, at last, "is out of the question. I can only suggest we follow leisurely on, and trust to the chapter of accidents to fall in with them towards the afternoon."

"Very good," replied the lady; "and if you will kindly accept the charge, I will place myself in your hands."

They jogged along for some little time in silence, and were now plodding along a road which, as Charlie informed his companion, would bring them to Nareham Gorse, a cover which, he continued to explain, it was very probable that the fox would make for. But on arriving at that favourite refuge of foxes they found no signs of the hunt; in short, they had now utterly lost the hounds, and were like people adrift in the desert, as far as having any recognised point to aim for. All inquiries proved hopeless; none of the farmers or labourers whom Charlie questioned had seen "aught of the hounds" that day. As for the lady, she bore her disappointment with great equanimity, and even laughed at the *fiasco*.

"I don't know whether you keep a hunting diary," she said, at length. "I do; but I don't think I shall make any entries concerning this day."

"Well, I don't," replied Charlie; "if I did I should

simply write in, 'Was an indolent idiot. I've no doubt it has been the run of the season, so far. What a fool I shall feel when they are all talking it over at dinner this evening.'

"You won't deem me too curious," said his fair companion, "if I ask the name of my fellow-sufferer?"

"I am Charles Devereux," he replied, "and live at North Leach, where we have been settled time out of mind."

"Devereux," she replied. "You are a brother, no doubt of that handsome Miss Devereux who rides so well; we are neighbours; my husband, Major Kynaston, has taken The Firs, which no doubt you know, for the season."

"Yes," replied Charlie, "I know the place very well. It is about ten miles from us. I hope you like it. The owner never lives in it, but it is nearly always let for the hunting season, though people don't so much care about it in the summer time. The fact is, it is a widely-scattered neighbourhood, and though we natives don't mind the long distances between our houses, yet strangers are apt to think them impossible."

"They certainly strike me in that wise," replied Mrs. Kynaston, laughing, "though I suppose, after all, it doesn't matter if you have plenty of horses. But if I mistake not, I turn off here, and so shall no longer be a trouble to you."

"Yes, you are close to home, which I only wish I was. My horse will have had enough of it before I get him back."

"Good bye," replied Mrs. Kynaston, as she extended her hand; "I trust the next time we meet, it will not be to pass such an unprofitable day."

Mrs. Kynaston laughed as she trotted homewards. "It is a blow, a sad blow, my dear," she muttered to herself; "your good-looking cavalier was blind, both to your charms and his opportunities. There are plenty of men I wot of who would have thought a day well spent at Kate Kynaston's bridle-rein. This fox-hunting is a very brutalising amusement. I don't believe Mr. Devereux knows what I'm like this minute. He was chafing all the way at having lost his beloved sport. As a gentleman, he couldn't refuse to take

care of an errant waif like myself; but I really believe if he had come across the hounds I should have been left to follow him as I best might. It is fortunate I had nothing to do with his mishap, or I veritably believe he would never have spoken to me again."

Mrs. Kynaston had read young Devereux pretty accurately. Charlie was bitterly disappointed at his misadventure. That young gentleman, although by no means insensible to his fair companion's charms, was an enthusiast about hunting. As before said, he rode well, and at twenty-one it was excusable that he should be a little conceited about it; no woman's smile at present could compare in his eyes with having had all the best of a real good fifty minutes, and now, after having missed all his fun, here he was with a good many weary miles to jog home on a tired horse, and haunted with the idea that there had been a real good run. And he had good grounds for so thinking. He knew that they had found and slipped away, certainly at a rare pace to start with, as he knew from the glimpses he had got of what might be termed the tail of the field. The hounds and the leading division he had never caught sight of. Then he wondered how Furzedon had got on. Then came speculation as to what luck had attended his chief rivals. Had they been lucky in getting away? Whom had fortune favoured? And who could lay claim to the proud distinction of having been in front throughout? Then he began to think once more of his late companion. "Yes," he reflected critically, "she is a pretty woman, and sits her horse very nicely. She was got up, too, most correctly. I wonder whether she is much of a horsewoman, and what sort of a fellow Major Kynaston is. Keen, I should say, or he wouldn't have left his wife to follow on by herself. I don't suppose my people know them yet, or I should have heard Phyllis speak of them. Hold up, old man" he exclaimed, as his hack made an awkward stumble, "we've only another four miles to do now, and you shall take your own time to do it, only don't go to sleep over it." The hack seemed to understand what his master said to him, for he pricked up his ears and proceeded of his own accord to jog on. It was probable that he awoke to the

fact that he was pretty close to his own stable, and determined that the sooner he got his day's work over the better. Charlie, as he anticipated, found himself the first home, as he had been the last to start. That he should vent his ill-humour on the luckless groom, who had charge of the missing hunter, was only natural. The poor fellow had done his best, but his master not turning up he had had to act on his own inspiration, and had unfortunately waited at the wrong end of the cover. He had then followed at a respectful distance, with three or four second horsemen who had fallen into the same mistake. This much only could he tell—that the hounds had run straight away from him, and this by no means assuaged the wrath of his angry master, who, having informed him that he was a perfect idiot, strode into the house. As the groom remarked to his fellows, with considerable justice, "It wasn't my fault. How am I to know which end of a wood a fox will break? If Mr. Charles had only been in time, we should have changed horses all right, and then he could have judged for himself."

Mr. Charles Devereux that night at dinner found that his instinct had not deceived him. He had to face a fire of merciless chaff about his coffee-house proclivities. He learnt that they had had a capital run with their first fox, who, after an hour and forty minutes, with only one check, had fairly beaten them; how that they had a capital second gallop in the afternoon after a fox which was brought satisfactorily to hand; and then, after the manner of sportsmen over their wine, they spared never a point nor details of the day's doings. They quoted every village and cover they had been near; from Winnington Scrubs to Bubbleton Brook, not a point was spared him, till even Furzedon, who had gone satisfactorily to himself through the whole business, rather winced under this little geographical victory. Especially cruel to the outsiders are fox-hunters when they get to full cry over the wine cup, and recount their wondrous accounts over Dabchick Pastures, or some similar locality in which nobody but a fox-hunter or a parish doctor ever found themselves; and then came a sharp cross-examination of how Charlie himself had spent his

day, but his answers were so curt and sulky, and his ill-humour concerning his mishap so very palpable, that they very soon gave over teasing him. One thing was curious—that the name of Mrs. Kynaston never passed his lips, whether it was accident, or whether he thought the admission would lead to further banter on the part of his sister and Furzedon, I can't say; there merely remains the fact that it was so.

IV.—'LINCOLN SPRING.'

LINCOLN Races! The budding of the Turf campaign, the first burst of spring for that mysterious world which regulates its winter by the Racing Calendar without respect to weather or almanac; a meeting sometimes postponed from frost and snow, but run off as a rule in bitter weather, and yet which attracts to it all the sport-loving denizens of the adjoining counties, to say nothing of that great body to whom racing is a business, and who have been growling over the inaction of the last two or three months. There is money to be made at Lincoln, no doubt, though it more often falls to the bookmaker to gather it than to the sanguine backer who so boldly invests his capital on some probably half-trained horse, of whose present form the stable have but a misty idea. But, besides these, there were the great hunting contingents from Yorkshire, from Nottinghamshire, and Leicestershire. Hard riders from the Quorn, the Pytchley, and the Bedale, from the Fitzwilliam, from the Brocklesby, and the Belvoir—all interested in the Open Steeplechase, the Hunt, and the Gone Away Plate, to any of which it is probable that some of these, or, for the matter of that, half-a-dozen other well-known packs, sent a competitor.

On a drag, opposite the Grand Stand, were congregated most of the people mentioned in the previous chapter. North Leach had come down in a strong party to the races. Old Tom Devereux and all his family were there, and with

them were the Kynastons, for by this time a considerable intimacy had sprung up between the two houses; and then had not both the Devereux and Major Kynaston both got a horse running? The old man was as keen as possible to see his son ride the winner both of the Hunt Steeplechase and the Gone Away Plate. In the former the Devereux had entered their four-year-old, of which Miss Lettice had thought so highly at the beginning of the hunting season, while the Major had picked up something a little before Christmas, that he had ascertained was pretty fast, and had hunted it just sufficiently to qualify. The North Leach people, indeed, knew very little about the Major's mysterious purchase. Seen him, of course, they had; but, whether Mrs. Kynaston was on his back, or the Major, he was never seen prominently, if there was anything like a run. The lady, although she rode nicely, was by no means given to hard riding. She enjoyed the sport in her own way, and by no means aspired to eclipsing other habits that might be out by witching horsemanship. Charlie Devereux was by this time amongst Mrs. Kynaston's devoted admirers, and she had not a few. One special trait that recommended her much in that young gentleman's eyes was that she did not want a "lead," or expect to be taken care of after the find, and always bade him not waste his chance of a good start by dallying too long at her side. About the Major nobody in that country knew much, although there were plenty of people in the London world that could have told a good deal concerning him.

Lounging on the lawn, his hands buried in the pockets of his ulster, was Gilbert Slade; he had come across with some friends from the country house in which he was staying to see the first big handicap of the season run, and at this moment one of his friends came up and suggested that they should go up to the top of the stand and see the race. Gilbert readily assented.

"It's a grind to get there," he said, "but there's nowhere that you can see the race so well from;" and the two accordingly toiled up the narrow little stone staircase that led to the roof, which they found already thickly peopled.

"How are you, Jocelyn?" said a tall, good-looking fel-

low, standing a pace or two in advance of them. "Bitter cold weather, isn't it? Have you got a wager on this affair?"

"No," replied the other, "it isn't often I indulge in that wise."

"Nor I," was the reply; "if I ever did, I should have been tempted this time; the joint owners of the Siren are wonderfully confident, and have insisted on all our leading people about here backing their jacket."

"It is too late now," said Gilbert, "or else I would have had a trifle on that tip."

The horses were already mustering under the starter's hand. Two or three false starts, and then they got off, on moderately level terms.

"Well, the owners of the Siren should be satisfied," exclaimed the tall young fellow who had before addressed them. "The only thing they were afraid of was their mare getting a bad start, but she's got off right in front."

For once the owners of the hot favourite had proved right in their calculations concerning a big handicap; before they had gone a quarter of a mile, the Siren had got a clean lead of her field, and from that out, she never caused her backers one moment's uneasiness. She went on improving her lead, was never even approached, and finally ran home an easy winner by half-a-dozen lengths.

"Well," said Gilbert, "I never saw such a procession as that in my life in a big race; and now it is over, I vote we forage for food. A north-east wind makes me confoundedly hungry."

"Ah! I'm afraid you'll have to rough it rather in that respect. There is not that magnificent choice of luncheon that generally presents itself at Ascot."

They made their way slowly down the crowded staircase, and went into the luncheon-room, but it was thronged; and there was apparently small chance of obtaining even standing room at one of the tables.

"Ah!" said Jocelyn, laughing, "you will have to control your unholy appetite for some time longer. When we do get an opening, it will be useless; these locusts will have devoured everything."

"Let's come away," rejoined Gilbert with a smile. "It's too much for a man in my state to watch his fellow-creatures feed." And the two young men pushed their way down stairs with the determination of assuaging their hunger with tobacco.

They had barely reached the centre of the lawn, when a portly, clean-shaven gentleman, with rosy cheeks and a good-humoured smile on his face, suddenly exclaimed, "Good-day, Mr. Jocelyn, I hope you like the chestnut?"

"Best horse I've got in my stable, Devereux. I only wish I could afford to come to you for another. You never miss Lincoln Spring, do you?"

"No, nor the Autumn either: but we are come down a large party this time. We're going to have a shy at a couple of the local races. There's a coach load of us all come to see Charlie win, we hope. By the way, gentlemen, will you have a glass of champagne? or mebbe you've had no lunch; I know by old experience that it's pretty rough-and-tumble work getting anything to eat in there."

"Well, we couldn't, Devereux, and that's all about it." replied Jocelyn laughing; "if you can get us anything, you'd be doing a real charity."

"Come along," said the old gentleman, with a jolly laugh. "The missus, when she has an outing, likes to do it comfortable, and you may depend upon it, when she gets on the coach it's well victualled."

"Manna in the wilderness, by Jove," whispered Gilbert as they followed the old gentleman across to his drag, where the *débris* of luncheon still lingered.

The two gentlemen were quickly introduced to the ladies, and hospitable Mrs. Devereux insisted upon their coming up on the drag, and having their luncheon "quite comfortable."

"I think we have met before, Mr. Slade," said Mrs. Kynaston, with a bright smile.

"Of course," replied Gilbert, "I remember you at Lady Ramsbury's garden party."

"Ah, Mr. Slade," said the lady, laughing, "I'll give you one bit of advice. There is nothing so dangerous as remembering too much. It couldn't have been at Lady Rams-

bury's, because I don't know her, but I came down to one of the big Aldershot field days last summer, and you lunched us all in your mess-room before we returned to town. The care Mr. Slade took of me on that occasion made a deeper impression on me than my charms did upon him."

"To be sure; very stupid of me," rejoined Gilbert, coolly, "that's the worst of a London season: one does get places muddled up so."

"Ah, you'll remember me another time. I'm about to embalm myself in your memory. Let me give you some of this pigeon pie, and next time we meet you'll murmur to yourself, 'Ah, she fed me when I was hungry.'"

"Thank you," rejoined Gilbert, laughing, "and if you could only guess how hungry I am, Mrs. Devereux. I am perfectly ashamed of my appetite."

"Can't pay me a better compliment," rejoined that lady. "I know, then, my cook has done her duty."

Neither Jocelyn nor Gilbert Slade were in any hurry to quit their new quarters. They could see there just as well as from the Grand Stand; while, as for the ladies, swathed in furs and rugs, there was no temptation for them to leave their seats. Old Tom Devereux was backwards and forwards between the drag and the betting lawn continuously. He had a large and numerous acquaintance, and was consequently shaking hands and exchanging jokes with old friends. Suddenly Gilbert's attention was diverted from the lively conversation he was holding with Mrs. Kynaston by an exclamation from Miss Devereux.

"Good gracious! Mr. Furzedon," she cried; "I never dreamt of seeing you here."

"Ah! I was bound to come down," he replied, "to see how the horse that carried you so well last winter acquits himself in the Hunt Steeplechase; and, from the hint I got in town a day or two ago, I thought I might find it profitable to get here in time for the big handicap."

"And I hope it has proved so," said Miss Devereux.

"Yes, thank you," he replied; "I had a very good race. No, nothing, thank you, Mrs. Devereux; I did all that at the Great Northern, before I came up to the course."

"Furzedon," thought Gilbert, "where was it I heard

that name only the other day? Ah!" he muttered to himself, "in Limmer's Coffee Room. That's the man they mentioned as having felled an unhappy wretch in the Haymarket, who hurled after him a malediction so terrible as to have attracted the attention of those fellows who saw it, and they were a festive lot, to whom a row in those parts was no novelty;" and then Gilbert dismissed the matter from his mind, and turned once more to his fair companion.

And now the numbers went up for the Gone Away Plate, and there was great excitement on the top of the drag to see Charlie's performance. Both Mrs. Kynaston and Lettice had a small venture in the success of Charlie's mount, which they regarded as already won. Could they have overheard a conversation between the Major and a seedy, sinister individual at the back of the betting-ring, they would not have felt quite so sanguine about the result.

"Ah, Major," said the latter, "I knows your horse well. Knew him before you had him, and you're quite right: he's just the sort to pick up these hunters' stakes on the flat; but, I warn you, you haven't got it all your own way this time. There's another party trying just the same game. I've no idea which of you has got the best of it; but remember there's another horse in the race which is no more a hunter than yours is."

"You're sure of what you say, Prance?"

"Quite," rejoined the other.

"Confound it. I've got a good bit of money on this."

"Well, you tell your jockey to keep his eye on The Decoy. And now, Major, times are hard, and I give you my word that information is worth a sovereign to you."

The Major paused for a second, and then unbuttoned his overcoat, took the coin from his waistcoat pocket, and handed it to his companion.

"Thank you, sir," replied the tout, for such he was. "I've always run straight with you, Major, and I'm quite sure of what I tell you. Yours and The Decoy will run first and second, and it'll be a race between 'em. I hope, for your sake, sir, yours is good enough to win." And thereupon Mr. Prance vanished with the utmost celerity,

and immediately invested the sovereign he had just received with a ready money bookmaker on Decoy.

Great was the excitement on the top of the drag as the competitors for the Gone Away Plate, after galloping three-quarters of the distance, turned into the straight, and the Major's black jacket was seen in the clear lead, and a cry arose from the Stand of "Rob Roy wins!" "Rob Roy in a canter!" but Mr. Prance had been only too correct in his diagnosis of the race.

As he came away from his field Charlie looked anxiously right and left for The Decoy, as the Major at the last moment had told him that that was the one quarter from which he might apprehend danger. But the gentleman on The Decoy was no neophyte; he had ridden many more races, was a far more cunning placer than Charlie, and was quite as well aware as young Devereux that he had nothing but Rob Roy to beat. Trusting to Charlie's inexperience, the minute he came away he followed directly in his track, the former casting anxious glances right and left could see nothing of his dangerous adversary, but somewhat astonished at the non-appearance of The Decoy, Charlie raced steadily home. Suddenly just before reaching the Stand, like a flash he saw the white jacket and crimson belt of Mr. Sexton's mare at his girths. It flurried him a little, no doubt, as the being caught close to home does most men in their first public race, still he kept his head marvellously well, and it wasn't till he saw that his opponent had fairly collared him opposite the Stand that he sat down and began riding in earnest. But it was of no use, his crafty opponent had already got a neck the best of him, and, to say nothing of being on perhaps the best horse, was certainly the more experienced "finisher" of the pair. He, too, began to ride his horse in resolute fashion, and not only held the advantage he had gained, but improved it to a good half length before he passed the winning-post.

There was wailing, half earnest and half laughing, on the top of the drag at the defeat of their champion. There were bitter maledictions on the part of the Major as to what he was pleased to term Mr. Sexton's unscrupulous

conduct, totally ignoring that Mr. Sexton had only succeeded and that he had failed; that otherwise their proceedings had been precisely similar, and there was considerable hilarity on the part of Mr. Prance, who had succeeded in adding three sovereigns to his store.

"Very bad, Miss Devereux," said Slade, "but we can only say that your brother, though defeated, was not disgraced. No man could have made a better struggle for it, and we can only say that it was his ill-luck to encounter an enemy a little too good for him."

I doubt whether Gilbert's uncle Norman would have given quite so merciful a verdict. I think he would have said, "He rides very nicely for a young one, but the old practitioner did him at the finish. If he had made the most of the commanding position he held when he got into the straight I should rather doubt The Decoy ever having caught him."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Devereux," said Slade. "Of course, we shall see you all here to-morrow, and then I trust your own jacket will be hailed the winner. In the meantime, Miss Devereux, let me thank you for your kindness to a couple of famishing wayfarers. And now here come your horses, and we must say good-bye."

"Good-bye," returned the hospitable old lady. "Good-bye, Mr. Jocelyn. Remember, I shall expect you both to luncheon to-morrow."

And with a cordial adieu all round the two young men took their departure.

"Deuced good find that," said Gilbert, as he and Jocelyn walked back to Lincoln. "Very pleasant people, and they have entertained us royally. What are they exactly?"

"People who have farmed in the Wolds for centuries, and on a large scale. The old man is held in the highest respect, and almost treated as a squire by the scattered gentlemen around him. As for Mrs. Kynaston, you apparently know more about her than I do. I hope they'll pull off the Hunt Steeplechase to-morrow, for they were evidently sadly disappointed about being beaten to-day."

V.—THE HUNT STEEPLECHASE.

THE next day was a great improvement on its predecessor: the wind was still keen, but there was very little of it, and a bright sun not only threw out considerable heat, but also had an enlivening effect on people's spirits. Mr. Prance, in high feather at his yesterday's success over the Gone Away Plate, was, for a gentleman of his saturnine temperament, quite genial, and was laughing and jesting with two or three of his mates—race-course hangers-on—who, like himself, picked up a precarious living in a by no means straitlaced fashion. Suddenly the man's manner was utterly transformed; he started as if he had been stung; and had any of those who had witnessed the *fracas* in the Haymarket been present to see, they would have noticed the same look of implacable resentment which had so arrested their attention on that evening. The cause was not far to seek, for they had just passed Mr. Furzedon strolling leisurely up the course with a friend.

"Ah!" muttered Mr. Prance to himself, "let me ever have the chance, and if I don't give you quittance in full, Mr. Furzedon, for all I owe you, may my hand and tongue be numb for ever in this world!"

Mr. Furzedon, quite unconscious of the very questionable blessing invoked on his head, passed on. It is doubtful whether he would have been much perturbed at Mr. Prance's thirst for vengeance had he been aware of it. He had been far too conscious of his superior physical strength, to say nothing of his infinitely superior position, to feel any anxiety about any harm such a man as Prance could work him. That the cause of quarrel between the two lay deeper than the blow he had struck him that night outside the supper rooms had been transparent even to the casual spectators, but what that was must at present remain a matter between themselves. One of the first persons the tout came across when he had made his way into the enclosure was Major Kynaston, who was carefully studying his race card.

"Well, sir," he said, "what I told you yesterday was

right enough; and it was a very close fit between yours and The Decoy."

"Yes, you were right enough, my man; and, change the jockeys, and it is possible it might have been quite the other way. Not but what Mr. Devereux rode very nicely; still the old hand, of course, proved a little too much for the young one. Race-riding, like everything else, requires a lot of practice; it was pretty nearly my man's first appearance in public, while Mr. Long has been riding for years. However, your information was worth the sovereign."

"Thank you, sir," replied Prance; "if I find out anything to-day I'll let you know."

The Major nodded; he could take pretty good care of himself on a racecourse, and was by no means to be led away by what he might pick up from a tout; Prance, he knew from former experience, was worth listening to, and now and again, as in the case of yesterday's race, really had come by a bit of genuine information.

Tom Devereux's drag, it need scarcely be said, was early drawn up opposite the Stand. The ladies were in high spirits, and confident in the extreme about victory to-day in the Hunt Steeplechase. In vain Charlie protested against such extreme confidence. "I've a good horse, I know, Lettice," he said; "but I may meet a better, just as I did yesterday."

"It won't do, Charlie," replied the girl; "we are bent upon returning victors to North Leach, and mind you don't disappoint us."

By this time the drag was surrounded by several young men, amongst whom Gilbert Slade, Jocelyn, and Furzedon were prominent.

"I suppose you are very fond of racing, Miss Devereux?" said Gilbert Slade, who had climbed to the roof of the drag.

"Fond of it?" she replied. "I can hardly say. I know next to nothing about it. We always take the coach to Doncaster, and I have been there two or three times. My father knows Lincoln races well; but neither mother nor I ever came here before; and this time it is in honour of Charlie's first appearance as a rider at the big meeting of his county."

"Then you are ignorant of the glories of Ascot and Goodwood?" said Slade.

"Utterly," replied Miss Devereux. "I know very little of London and its gaieties, although, of course, I am aware what great gatherings of fashion those two race meetings are. We are very plain, humdrum people. A run to the sea when the crops are in constitutes our summer gaiety, though occasionally I get asked to my aunt's in South Kensington. She is papa's sister, you must know, and married a man who was in some kind of business in London, I'm sure I don't know what, but he has left her a very comfortably off widow, and she knows a lot of people, and I always have a very pleasant time when I go to stay with her."

"Ah! I daresay Mrs. —, I beg your pardon, what did you say your aunt's name was?" said Slade.

"I didn't mention it," rejoined Lettice, smiling, "but it is Mrs. Connop, and she lives in Onslow Gardens. She is a very bustling woman, who enjoys life keenly, entertains herself a good deal, and goes to everything. I have always had a very gay six weeks with her, and that's all I ever know of London dissipation. You, I dare say, have had years and years of it?"

"I have had my fling," rejoined Slade, quietly; "but I am a soldier, and am very often quartered a long way from London. Just at present I am at Aldershot; but we expect to move northwards in a couple of months, and though I dare say I shall manage a month or six weeks, it will be, like yourself, a mere gulp at the wine-cup, but no draining of the goblet to the dregs; I only trust that we shall meet."

"I haven't been asked yet," rejoined Miss Devereux, "and that is the first and most important step in my London season! But—there, the numbers are up surely for the next race."

"Ah!" rejoined Gilbert, laughing. "I am afraid they have just finished that race, and we have actually been gossiping during the contest. Never mind it was only a small selling affair; and I don't suppose any of us are really interested in anything but the Hunt Steeplechase."

"Now," said Mrs. Kynaston, with a little grimace, "there must be an end to all this idle gossip. The serious business of the day is about to commence—we have done with the *entrées*, and come to the *pièce de résistance*. I have got a fortune on the sky-blue jacket and white sleeves. I don't often go in for a gamble, but I have asked Mr. Furdzon to put me ten pounds on Pole Star."

"That's plunging with a vengeance," rejoined Lettice, "and you ought really to win a good deal of money. But Charlie tells me that he has got me fifty pounds to five about his mount."

"Yes," interrupted Jocelyn, "you're entitled to a good price, Miss Devereux. I don't suppose even your father or your brother are backing Pole Star heavily, and the Fletchers are supposed to farm this race—to enjoy almost a monopoly of it. The only thing that ever puzzles us is which to back of the two brothers, George or Jim; they're about equally good horsemen, and the difficulty is to find out which is riding the best horse."

"And what are they doing about these formidable brothers now?" inquired Mrs. Kynaston.

"George Fletcher's mount is first favourite," replied Jocelyn, "but I noticed some very shrewd farmers taking the longer odds about Jim's horse. Don't think me a renegade, Miss Devereux; I have backed your brother, but I have also got a trifle on Jim Fletcher."

And now the horses, having paced past the Stand, come thundering down again in their preliminary canter. Nothing, perhaps, goes better than a big raking chestnut that Charlie Devereux is handling; the favourite looks "fit" as hands can make him, and is pronounced a nice "mover" by the *cognoscenti*, and the men of the Midlands have keen eyes for that sort of thing. There is a varmint wear-and-tear look, too, about Jim Fletcher's mount that led good judges to think he might prove troublesome to the winner at the finish. Still, although out of the half-score runners that were all backed more or less, yet it was quite evident that the Ring, as well as the backers generally, believed in nothing but the Fletchers. Rattle, indeed, was a hot favourite, and Jim Fletcher's mount advanced so rapidly in

public estimation, that when the starter mustered the horses it was quoted at only a couple of points behind his brother's. It is not very difficult to dispatch a lot of horses on a three-mile race. A few lengths, which are often never to be recovered in a short distance on the flat, are of very little account in the long cross-country journey, and in a very few minutes they are away. For the first half-mile nothing takes a very decided lead; at the end of that time Jim Fletcher's black jacket shoots decidedly to the front, and many of his backers at once deplore their infatuation, as they murmur,

"The favourite's the real pea, after all, and Jim is only making running for his brother;" and that this impression was shared by the jockeys riding in the race seemed probable, as Charles Devereux and the best of them waited in a cluster upon George Fletcher, who was distinguished from his brother by wearing a red cap.

In the mean time Jim sailed gaily away, his varmint-looking steed jumping in faultless fashion, until he had stolen a lead of nearly a field from his opponents. Half the distance had now been traversed, and young though Charlie Devereux was at the business, it suddenly occurred to him, as it also did to one of his companions in a bright green jacket, that they were letting Jim Fletcher get a very dangerous distance in front; he turned it over for a few seconds in his mind, and the minute they had cleared the next fence he shot to the front, closely attended by the green jacket, and, a little to his bewilderment, by George Fletcher. The latter worthy laughed low in his beard, as he muttered,

"It's getting about time to give the backers of the favourite a show for their money; but if Jim ever let's us catch him now, he is a much bigger fool than I think him."

Mrs. Kynaston was a lady who had seen a good deal of racing, one way and the other, and, what is more, was really a fair judge when she did see it.

"I am afraid they have let the black jacket slip them," she said; "they have let him gain such a tremendous lead, they'll never succeed in catching him. However, Mr. Devereux seems quite alive to the situation now."

Jim Fletcher continued to pursue the even tenor of his way. Now and again he shot a glance over his shoulder, but could see no antagonist near him.

"They can't intend me to come in alone, surely," he thought.

But already Charlie, closely attended by George Fletcher, the green jacket, and one or two others, was rapidly diminishing the wide gap that lay betwixt himself and the leader.

"Ah," exclaimed Miss Devereux, "they will catch the black jacket now by the time they enter the straight!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kynaston; "my only fear is that he has been rather hard upon Pole Star in doing so, and that he will find that he has not much left in his horse just when the pinch comes."

Miss Devereux was quite right. As Jim Fletcher jumped the fence on to the racecourse, his companions had begun to take close order with him, but he still held the four lengths' lead of Pole Star. But there was just this difference: whereas Jim Fletcher's horse jumped the fence well and cleanly, Pole Star, for the first time, fenced in slovenly fashion. There was nothing now between the competitors and the winning-post but a hurdle about half-way up the straight—nothing of a jump, but just the sort of a thing to bother a beaten horse. Charlie was still lying second, with the green jacket waiting at his quarters. Steadily he crept up, and as they neared the hurdle Jim Fletcher held a bare two lengths' lead. But there was this difference between him and his antagonists: he had never hustled or called upon his horse the whole way round. Zadkiel, the leader, jumps it beautifully, but Pole Star hits it heavily, and blunders nearly on his knees, and quickly though Charlie recovers him, the *contretemps* is fatal; before he can fairly set his horse going again the green jacket has passed him, and George Fletcher is alongside of him; but Zadkiel's ride is not the man to throw away a chance. His horse is fighting strong with him, and he comes right away at once. Desperately though the green jacket rides his horse he cannot get within hail of the leader, while Charlie and George Fletcher, after one brief call upon their steeds,

ceased riding, and finished third and fourth respectively.

"Yes," said the Major, as he watched the race from that high bit of scaffolding designated as the Stand in Tattersall's Ring, "I was right—quite right. My dear young friend, till you've had a good bit more practice it is throwing money into the fire to back your mount. You would have about won to-day if you had not been so completely gammoned by those Fletchers. I should like to know them; they've a pretty idea of picking up a race. To win with a horse that was supposed to be making running while the field were all waiting on the favourite is ingenious. Prance was right. He said he couldn't make out which, but that one of the Fletchers would take that steeplechase for certain. I haven't done so badly over it, but, of course, I mustn't admit that; they will think it rank heresy over the way if I acknowledge to having followed anything but the Devereux colours."

"Oh, dear," cried Miss Devereux, on the box of the drag, "what a piece of bad luck! I'm sure Pole Star wouldn't have been beaten if it hadn't been for that unlucky mistake at the last hurdle."

"No," said Mrs. Kynaston, quietly, "there's a great deal of luck in racing, and this unfortunately wasn't run to suit your brother. Better luck next time, Lettice."

Mrs. Kynaston knew a great deal better than that. She was perfectly aware of how the race had been run, and why Pole Star had blundered so badly at the last hurdle—seen it all, indeed, just as clearly as her husband, but she was not the woman to make herself unpleasant by insinuations of that sort, and so they had another glass of champagne all round, and indulged in strong tirades against the shameful machinations of the Fletchers, and agreed that tricks of this description were not legitimate, and that the Fletchers ought to be ashamed of themselves.

People who lose their money are somewhat apt to argue in this wise. There was nothing inadmissible in the tactics of the Fletchers. All that could be said was that their opponents, had they not been rather inexperienced, would never have been fooled by them, and yet practised jockeys have fallen into similar error.

At this juncture Charlie Devereux appeared at the side of the coach. "Awful sorry, Lettice," he said. "I apologise all round. I really think I had a pretty good chance, but the Fletchers really gammoned me out of the race. So sorry I lost your money, Mrs. Kynaston, but I plead guilty to having been green as any gosling. When I recognised the trap they had laid for us it was too late. I had to be so hard on Pole Star to catch Jim Fletcher that it is little wonder that my horse had had enough of it when we got into the straight."

"Never mind, Mr. Devereux, you'll ride the winner of the Liverpool before two or three years are over. All trades require a little practice, and," she said, leaning over the coach to speak to him, "you *can* ride, you know."

Charlie made no reply, but if ever eyes acknowledged the balm poured into wounded vanity, he did. Men, and more especially young men, are wont to think tenderly of women who bind up their hurts in this wise. Charlie concealed his feelings tolerably well, but he felt in his heart he had thrown the race away, and firmly believed that if he had never let Jim Fletcher get more than some ten or a dozen lengths in front of him, he would have beaten him. And now the horses come up, and, with many handshakes and hearty wishes for meeting again, the little party breaks up, the Devereux and Kynastons returning to North Leach, while Gilbert Slade and Mr. Jocelyn again crossed the Nottinghamshire border.

VI.—SIR RONALD RADCLIFFE.

THE bitter north-east wind has at last departed, the swallows in scores are cutting the clear, pure, sweet air. The spring handicaps are things of the past; the trees are all in the glory of their early foliage; and spring is fast melting into glorious summer.

The London season is in full swing, strawberries are rapidly becoming within the reach of people of moderate

incomes; the Derby has been lost and won, and Ascot is a thing to be looked back upon with feelings of bitter anguish, or joyous murmurs of victory. The Row is all alive this bright June morning, thronged with the votaries of fashion, thronged with those who would fain pass as such, crowded with cynics who watch the gaudy parade with scoffing eyes. Yes, with struggling young men, who only wish their profession would leave them no leisure to show there; with men who cannot get rid of their weariness; with men who have quite got rid of their money, but cling to the gay pageant from habit, and as the cheapest amusement that is left to them; young ladies, whose rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes, and animated manner betoken that they are new to the joys of the season; their more experienced sisters, with the languid air of those who have awoke to the knowledge that "the gilt is off the gingerbread;" veteran campaigners, both married and single, painfully alive to the misery of their exacting dressmakers, wearily conscious of those four new dresses for Ascot that have produced no results; the equestrians canter up and down with careless smile, as if Care never sat behind the horseman, although young Locksley wonders whether his hack will ever be paid for; while Mr. Manners carries a note in his breast-pocket from McGillup, the livery-stable keeper, with an intimation that that is the last mount he can be supplied with, till he, McGillup, has had something on account.

Looking on at the queer raree-show is a man who seldom troubles it. A slight, wiry, clean-shaved man, with keen dark eyes and a most determined expression about the mouth. He stoops slightly, and his hair is heavily shot with white; his dress is peculiar, scrupulously neat, but slightly old-fashioned; but though Norman Slade would never have been accused of spending much money on his attire, yet the man would have been a very poor judge indeed who took him for anything but a gentleman. He has possessed himself of a chair, and having lighted a cigar, sits there ruminating. He seldom has occasion to raise his hat, for with ladies his acquaintance seems to be very limited. But with the other sex it is different. Nod

after nod is exchanged with Norman, and many of those who salute him are members of the aristocracy, or well-known men about town. Norman Slade, although his name figures neither in the Peerage nor in Burke's Landed Gentry, comes of a good and perfectly well-known family; but it is chiefly through his passion for the Turf and his long career about town that he has acquired the numerous acquaintances which he undoubtedly possesses. Men, as a rule, like and respect, but are just a little afraid of Norman; he is what is termed "thoroughly straight," a word of great significance on the Turf; he is an excellent companion, full of anecdote, and can be most amusing when pleased with those about him. But, as before said, he has a rough edge to his tongue, and, if annoyed, can be bitterly sarcastic. He has lounged into the Park this morning to indulge in what he calls a "think." During the past week he has met Major Kynaston at dinner, and it is not to be supposed that, although he had never encountered him, a man like Norman Slade did not know Major Kynaston pretty well by repute. The Major enjoyed a reputation that even he would have deemed it desirable to bury if possible; nobody could have brought any direct charge against him, but it is equally certain that nobody would ever have described the Major as "thoroughly straight." He was notoriously lucky at *écarté*, and indeed at cards generally, while he was equally considered a terribly sharp practitioner in his betting transactions.

Of all this Norman Slade was well aware; but what was it to him? He would have grinned at the idea of the Major inveigling him into any little things to his detriment on either card-table or race-course; but at this dinner Major Kynaston had not only mentioned having made the acquaintance of Gilbert, but had very much exaggerated the extent of their intimacy. Now Norman was fond of his nephew, and had often said, "Thank God, the boy is no fool;" but he knew by repute what a very pretty and attractive woman Mrs. Kynaston was, and in his own vernacular he could not help thinking that the pair might be a little too much for any "young one," be he ever so

clever. He had not heard of Bertie for some time, and was far too good a judge, if he really had got intimate with these Kynastons, to interfere directly. But he was not going to see his favourite nephew plucked and made a fool of either; and it was notorious that many a plump pigeon had emerged from the Kynaston dovecot so utterly devoid of feathers that his dearest friends stood aghast at the completeness of the operation. Gilbert Slade, however, as we know, was in no such danger as his uncle pictured. He had seen nothing of Mrs. Kynaston since Lincoln Races, and, though thinking her a very pretty and pleasant woman to talk to, had been by no means fascinated; he did not possess that inflammable and susceptible temperament that is so easily smitten with love-fever. His was one of those harder natures, somewhat slow to feel anything of that kind, but who, when they do succumb to the arrow of the rosy god, are wont to love with a strong earnestness not easily diverted from its purpose.

But though Gilbert Slade would have freely acknowledged the charms of either Mrs. Kynaston or Miss Devereux, yet he had thought but little about them since he had wished them "good-bye." His regiment had moved, as he had said it would, up to the North from Aldershot, and the consequence was that Gilbert had been little in London this season.

The Kynastons had thrown up The Firs at the end of the hunting season, and were now quietly established in a snug little house in Mayfair. Mrs. Kynaston was a woman who went a good deal into society; there were people who declined to know her, saying that her flirtations were rather too numerous and pronounced for their taste; but she had never committed herself by causing a grave scandal, and in many houses was a favoured guest. As for the Major, he took his own way in London; he was never seen with his wife, and rarely in society; he had his own haunts and amusements, such as the club card-room, bachelor dinners, little theatrical suppers, trips down to suburban meetings, etc. He and his wife certainly lived under the same roof, but when in London saw very little of each other—their dining *tête-à-tête* being a rare occurrence, and

the Major was not given to entertaining. Mrs. Kynaston always pleaded their poverty on this point; but for all that, it was notorious amongst her intimates that she gave the nicest little lunches possible. There were never, at the outside, above half-a-dozen people, and there was no laboured profusion, but the three or four dishes were admirably cooked and the wine always undeniable.

Norman Slade had been rather indignant at finding Major Kynaston amongst the people he had been asked to meet. He was by no means particular, and had met queer people at the dinner-table before now, but he had always disliked all he had heard about Kynaston, and when they met he conceived an actual antipathy to him. He was a man strong in his dislikes, and it so happened the Major had been placed next him on this occasion. Kynaston, for his own purposes, had grossly exaggerated his acquaintance with Gilbert, which was, in reality, of the very slightest, as he had seen but little of him on the one occasion of their meeting. Moreover, like most of his class, he had a tremendous idea of his own astuteness; he was always vaunting that nobody ever got over Dick Kynaston, and fell, as such men invariably do, into the mistake of thinking he could turn his fellows inside out. He thought Norman Slade might give him many a valuable hint in Turf matters. He had heard of that gentleman's reputation for reticence, but only let him—Dick Kynaston—make his acquaintance, and he would very soon worm out of him what he knew.

Norman Slade actually swelled with indignation at that dinner, when, under an affectation of boisterous jocularly, he recognized that the Major was actually attempting to pump him! Can you fancy what the feelings of a crack leader at the Old Bailey would be at being cross-examined by Mr. Briefless? But after a while Norman began to take a saturnine pleasure in the operation, though the Major would have been hardly reassured could he have heard Slade's remark to himself as he walked home:

"If that chattering beast puts together all he has got out of me, he'll find it amounts to very little, and is more calculated to mislead him than not."

The Major, on the contrary, went home with the impression that he had quite subdued the slight prejudice against him on the part of Norman Slade to commence with; that he had parted with that gentleman on the most friendly terms, and had already possessed himself to some slight extent with Slade's views on forthcoming Turf events. We do at times go home pluming ourselves on the favourable impression we have produced, serenely unconscious that our host and hostess may have mutually agreed that as it was the first, so should it be the last time we gather round their hospitable board. There is no end to the limit of human vanity, and the people who honestly recognise that they have, to use a slang phrase, not "come off" in a social gathering are few and far between. Most of us believe that it is our jest or repartee that gave brilliancy to the meeting, or that it was our never being vouchsafed an opportunity clothed the gathering with such unmitigated dulness. No man had a higher opinion of himself as a conversationalist than the Major. He had a good stock of stories, and not hackneyed stories, which he told well, and he had a jovial off-hand sort of manner, very apt to impose upon those who were not shrewd observers. He never made a greater mistake than when he thought he had imposed upon Norman Slade. The gentleman, who had carefully avoided knowing him for some years, was never so thoroughly convinced of the correctness of his judgment as at this moment.

Suddenly a tall, haggard-looking man stopped abruptly opposite Norman, and with a curt "How d'ye do, Slade?" sat himself down on the adjacent chair. The merest novice could have made no mistake about the status of the newcomer. He was undoubtedly a man about whose position in the world there could be little doubt, though the worn and haggard face was that of a man who, though still in his prime, was living a life that must break the strongest constitution if persisted in. The dark circles under the eyes, and the careworn lines about the mouth, were indicative of a man who kept abnormal hours, and never ceased battling with fortune, and his face did not belie

him—play in some shape was pretty much Sir Ronald Radcliffe's idea of existence.

"Nice morning, Slade," he said, as he settled himself in a chair. "Not often you come amongst the trees and the dickey birds, and you're about right. Awful bore, you know, if it's only the taking your hat off. Don't know why I come here, knowing such a lot of women as I do. Heard anything of old Bill Smith lately?"

"Yes," said Norman, gravely. "I'd a few lines from him not long ago, in which he said he had small hopes of his half-dozen two-year-olds this year, that they were all backward, and he believed most of them bad—in short, I am afraid, Radcliffe, that Bill has gone to the deuce. There isn't such a horseman on the Turf, there isn't such a judge in a trial in England, but I hear from up in the North that they can trust him no longer. I don't mean that he isn't square enough, but that drink has laid hold of him, and there's no depending on his being sober when wanted."

"End of everything when it comes to that," said Sir Ronald. "A fellow gets mistaking the winning-post and all sorts of games."

"Ah, well," said Slade, dreamily, "you and I, Radcliffe, have landed many a pretty *coup* out of poor old Bill's inspirations. I shall go up and stay with him about the back end, and I'll slip you a line then, and tell you what I think of him. As for the horses, I don't suppose his young ones are worth looking at."

"It's getting about time I had a turn over something," replied the baronet, moodily. "Money is getting scarce as corn was in the bad times of Pharaoh. Don't know how the deuce you manage, Norman; things never seem to fly up and hit you in the face."

"Well, Radcliffe," rejoined Slade, "I neither bet nor spend money like you—haven't got it, and never had it, so I can't. I go for a *coup* now and again, as you know, but then it is on the strength of very excellent information, and I always stand to win a good stake at comparatively a small risk. My usual betting is a thing that never makes

me uncomfortable, and as for my whist, shillings and half-crowns content me."

"By Jove!" said Sir Ronald, turning half round in his chair and surveying his companion in languid astonishment. "What a deuce of a lot of time you must have to spare! Why, it would take you hours, and be a sinful waste of luck, to collect a few pounds at that price."

"Never you mind," rejoined Slade; "I only play for amusement."

"Of course—so does everybody; whist is a healthy recreation. My dear Norman, beware of indolence; and whist, for such pitiful points as you mention, is a waste of those golden hours, concerning which that impostor, the bee, is always dangled before our eyes. Don't know much about that insect myself, but a fellow conversant with his habits told me the other day that the bee was nothing like such a fool as these ballad-mongers made him out; that when he had the chance, he infinitely preferred stealing honey from the nearest grocer's to toiling for it on his own account.

"Well, Baronet," rejoined Slade; "you and I are old friends, and I'm not likely to leave you out in the cold whenever I get a chance. You can work a commission as well as anybody I know, and I know from experience; don't cackle. But, honestly, at the present moment I know nothing more than most racing men about coming events; and as for what you want, a real good chance at long odds, have no conception of such a thing."

"Well," rejoined the Baronet, "much obliged to you for your good opinion, old man. The financial crisis presents its constantly-recurring aspect; but there's nothing more to be done than, in the words of the ballad, 'Fear not, but trust in Providence,' and devoutly hope my creditors will trust in me;" and with this Sir Ronald picked himself out of his chair, and, with a slight nod to his companion, strolled onwards.

"Good fellow that," muttered Slade; "and, for all his swagger and languid airs, just as 'cute a man about racing as I know. They tell me he plays a capital rubber besides; but it must all beat him at last. He's an extrava-

gant man, and perpetually playing for stakes out of all proportion to his capital. I wonder what Sir Ronald began the world with. He had a fair income, no doubt, to start with, but I should think he has reduced it a good deal since he came into the property, and, from all accounts, her ladyship is not likely to make his income go further."

As for the subject of these remarks, he strolled in his usual listless fashion towards Hyde Park Corner, exchanging greetings right and left on his way. Everybody seemed to know him, and with every one did he seem popular. Women smiled and bowed to him with *empressement*; men greeted him heartily, and not with that careless nod that signifies utter indifference at meeting one. Radcliffe was as popular a man as any in London; but how he had lasted so long with his extravagant habits was an enigma that puzzled those who knew him best extremely.

VII.—FURZEDON STARTS ON HIS WAR-PATH.

"WELL, Lettice, I am very glad to have you with me again, though I don't quite know how I shall amuse you now you are here."

"Nonsense, auntie," rejoined Miss Devereux, laughing. "You London people always seem to us country folks to go out so much. I am sure when I pass six weeks with you I go out more than I do in all the remaining weeks of the year."

"I am a sociable being," laughed Mrs. Connop; "and as Providence has given me the wherewithal to keep up a good house, I like to see people about. I like to see young people, too, about me. It keeps one from getting rusty, and I have no idea of settling down into an old woman before my time."

Nobody certainly would have described Mrs. Connop as an old lady. She carried her fifty years wonderfully well; without affecting any undue juvenility, she was as

sprightly a woman of her age as any in London, fond of society, full of go, and a fluent talker, she had got together a large if somewhat mixed acquaintance. She went everywhere, and, though it is quite possible that fastidious people would have pronounced her not in society, she mixed freely in an extensive social world of her own. She might be unrecognised by the queens of the fashionable world, but there are various circles in London that exchange the most friendly relations, although their names never figure in the *Morning Post*. A young lady under Mrs. Connop's chaperonage would be certain to have a good time of it, although, perhaps, she would not be seen in the stately mansions of Belgravia. Lettie made no disguise about it: she always looked forward eagerly to an invitation to Onslow Gardens.

The Devereux were an energetic family, and never allowed themselves to be bored anywhere; they were people who could always make for themselves occupation, and although North Leach was a quiet enough place when the hunting-season was over, yet Miss Devereux never found her time hang heavily on her hands. Still, Lettie invariably regarded her London visit as one of the best "bits" in her year. There was, too, just a little bit of uncertainty about it, that gave a zest to the invitation. Although her aunt had asked her regularly since she had left school, yet there was always a possibility that that enterprising lady might take it into her head to go abroad for a time. This year Lettie was looking forward to seeing a good deal of the Kynastons while in town; she did not care very much about the Major, but she had struck up a great friendship with Mrs. Kynaston. That lady reciprocated the feeling. There was a freshness about Lettie which, though it a little amused her, she could not but regret the loss of in herself. Married to a man like the Major, she had not been likely to retain that quality long; and there were times when Kate Kynaston felt bitterly sick of the life she was condemned to lead. The only daughter of fashionable, but impecunious parents, it had been impressed upon her from her childhood that she was bound to marry the first eligible suitor that presented himself. Captain Kynaston, as he was then, a fast young

man in a crack Dragoon regiment, and with the reputation of considerably more money than he had ever possessed, seemed to Kate's father to fulfil all reasonable expectations; it is true, when they came to the settlements, that battered old *roué* felt somewhat disappointed, but things had gone too far to retract, and he could do no more than to see that such settlement as Kynaston could or would make was tightly tied up. There is much virtue in a settlement to gentlemen of the Kynaston type, as it not uncommonly becomes to them after a few years the sole source of income upon which they can confidently count. The Major's case was not exactly so bad as that, but with his tastes for good living, the card-table, and the race-course, his income, outside that settled on his wife, might be termed a little precarious.

There were people who spoke slightingly and shook their heads over Kate Kynaston's doings, although civil enough to her when they met. Kate's audacity sometimes paralysed them, and Kate's quick tongue undoubtedly awed them. She was a dangerous woman to splinter lances with; she had a quick eye for the joints in her adversary's harness; she mixed much in the world, and was thoroughly *au courant* with all the fashionable scandal of that world; and the quick, rapier-like thrust she could deliver under a traducer's guard had made women wondrous shy of personally attacking her. But for all that, there were times when Kate tired bitterly of this ceaseless battle of life—of this continuous struggle to hold her own in the weary treadmill of society. It is all very well if you are one of the heavy galleons that sail under a recognised flag, but for the dashing privateers that flaunt their own gay colours, and only hold their own by finesse, adroitness and cajolery, its fruits savour of the Dead Sea.

Kate Kynaston was just the woman who in the last century might have renounced all pomps and vanities, and betaken herself to a convent, might also very probably have got painfully bored with the seclusion in six months, emerged again into the world and become more *mondaine* than ever; but in the days of which I am writing this was not to be thought of; moreover, the Major, if he had no

great regard for his wife, would have been the last man to permit anything of that sort. Mrs. Kynaston usually assented to his wishes with easy indifference, but the Major had a dim perception that there might come a time when some point should raise a battle royal between them, and that, should such arise, Kate might prove troublesome to coerce.

It is singular how we re-act upon each other's destinies; we go along on our own jog-trot road till suddenly some new being, of whose existence we have so far never heard, crosses our path, and changes the whole current of our destiny. Impossible to say what this new factor in the woof of our lives may do for us, but so it is; his advent changes our fate for good or evil. Mr. Furzedon, a few months ago, was utterly unknown, even by name, to all the characters in this story; even Charlie Devereux, whose acquaintance with him was the longest, had known him scarce eighteen months; and yet this man is destined to considerably affect most of the leading characters in this narrative. Mr. Furzedon has left Cambridge, not seeing his way into getting much more profit out of that University. He gave some very extensive wine and supper parties previous to his departure, at which no expense was spared. As before said, he was a man who could spend money freely when he saw a possible return for doing so. And in this instance he was anxious to thoroughly clinch his acquaintance with all the eligible young men he had contrived to get intimate with.

Mr. Furzedon has established himself in chambers in Ryder Street, and, as he sits lingering over a latish breakfast, is meditating deeply how he is to set about working his way into society of some sort. A shrewd, pushing man, callous to a rebuff, and of considerable tenacity of purpose, he was pretty certain to attain his end before long. As he had gone to the University with the sole purpose of making desirable acquaintance, so he had lately contrived to get himself elected to a club. It was not, perhaps, one of the crack establishments of the West End, but had a fair second-rate reputation, and its ballot was known to be **not so stringent as in some possessed of greater prestige.**

Like even the best of clubs, its members were rather a mixed lot. Mr. Furzedon frequented the Parthian with great assiduity; he set himself to work to learn the names and history of the members, and it is astonishing how much a man who makes that kind of thing his business can pick up about his brethren. There are clubs of which it is said: "They never let the wrong man in there." Sheer fallacy! The most exclusive coterie, like any other community, cannot avoid falling into that mistake. If at times institutions like the Parthian, owing to a shortness of members, are not quite so strict in their ballot, it naturally follows that the proportion of black sheep is larger, and it was in sifting the black from the white that Mr. Furzedon was now engaged. The conduct of clubmen is erratic; there is the pleasant, genial, talkative man, known to every one, but of whose life nobody can tell anything after he has passed the club porter; there is the man who dines there three hundred nights out of the year, but who apparently knows nobody, and invariably takes his meal in solitude; there is the member who drowns you with his own affairs; the irascible member who is in weekly communication with the Committee.

It was not likely that Furzedon could arrive at a sketch of the lives of all of his brethren, but he did of a great many. He himself was merely a representative of a type found in all similar institutions, the man who invariably calls the waiters and inquires the name of any one whose face he does not know. Where Furzedon thought his inquiries satisfactory, he endeavoured to scrape an acquaintance. This brings in again another type of club man, not quite such a bore, perhaps, as Joe Thompson, who, as the legend goes, always commenced his insidious advances by treading on his victim's corns and then apologising, but Mr. Furzedon was conscious that he must do something more than that. Club acquaintance by no means leads to intimacy with social surroundings. He was busy this morning thinking what houses he could call at, and Mr. Furzedon felt gloomily that, with the end he had in view, they were very circumscribed in number. There was Mrs. Kynaston, but then he did not know where she was. She

was a lady with no fixed abode, and though she and the Major usually spent six months of their year in town, yet they rented their house as they chanced to pick it up. Ah! there was Mrs. Connop, that was the aunt Miss Devereux always came to stay with, and surely Miss Devereux must be in town by now. No difficulty in finding Mrs. Connop, she had a permanent abode, her address was easily to be arrived at in the Blue Book, and if he could only see Miss Devereux, she would probably know where Mrs. Kynaston resided.

Adhering to his plan, Mr. Furzedon made his way out towards South Kensington that afternoon, and in Piccadilly he passed Gilbert Slade. Now he had never seen that gentleman, except at Lincoln races, and the Slades as a race were not people who knew you lightly. Furzedon even on that occasion had hardly exchanged half-a-dozen words with him, but, constant to the principle he had laid down, he nevertheless nodded genially to Gilbert. That gentleman's face simply expressed blank recognition, and then he returned the salutation by slightly touching his hat. Gilbert Slade, in good truth, had no recollection of who it was that had bowed to him; but Mr. Furzedon had two points invaluable to him in the *rôle* he proposed to play—he had a capital memory for both names and faces.

That afternoon witnessed the *début* of Mr. Furzedon in Onslow Gardens. The defunct pawnbroker's son had, at all events, mastered one of the mysteries of fashion: he had learnt how to knock. One may think the knocking at a door is of no consequence, perhaps not to the proprietors of the house, who may or may not hear it, and who very likely, if they do, pay little attention to it. I am not going to enter into that vast question so intelligible to those conversant with the history of the knocker, to whom the knock of the post, the dun, the taxes, the begging petitioner, the borrower, the wealthy but exasperated relative, etc., are as easy to read as telegrams. I am alluding only to the visitor's knock. And in the servants' hall this is interpreted on a mutely acknowledged scale accordingly. On those of the nervous, timid and hesitating knock, they invariably bestow arrogance and contumely, but to the donor of the

bold, audacious roulade on the knocker they are invariably cap in hand. Delicious are the errors into which these clumsy menials constantly fall, except they are servants of the very best class: the swaggering manner and a certain gorgeousness of dress will constantly impose upon them. They kootoo to the confident stockbroker, and turn up their noses at the more diffident peer.

Mr. Furzedon, in all the gorgeousness of his summer raiment preceded by his dashing peal on the knocker, was just the sort of man that quiet servitors would be startled by. There was nothing *outré* about his garments, but everybody will understand what I mean when I say that they were just a little too glossy. It is difficult to explain, but a well-dressed man of the world never seems to put on a new coat. Furzedon was wont to have the appearance of having received his clothes only the night before from his tailor.

Yes, Miss Devereux was staying there, and Mrs. Connop would be very glad to see Mr. Furzedon, was the answer that came down in acknowledgment of his cards. Mr. Furzedon lost no time in responding to the invitation, and as he entered the drawing-room Lettice advanced to meet him, and, after shaking hands with him, at once presented him to her aunt.

"Very glad, indeed, Mr. Furzedon, to make your acquaintance. I am always pleased to see any friends of my family; and Lettie tells me that you have been staying at North Leach all the winter, and are now quite a known man with the Brocklesby."

"I am afraid Miss Devereux is a little laughing at me when she says that. I certainly can claim in one sense to be a well-known man in that country, namely, that I was a constant attendant at their meets, and had capital good fun; but a well-known man is usually translated into a very prominent horseman with such hounds. I am afraid I wasn't quite that. They were all a little too good for me down there."

"Ah, Auntie, you must not trust to this mock humility. Mr. Furzedon held his own with most of us."

"Very good of you to say so, Miss Devereux, and I'll

not be such a fool as to argue that view of the case with you. Anyway, Mrs. Connop, I had a capital time at North Leach, and two very jolly days at Lincoln afterwards, although, sad to say, the family banner—that is metaphorical for colours, you know—was not triumphant."

"Never mind," exclaimed Mrs. Connop; "I wasn't born a Devereux without knowing something of these things. I didn't see it, but Charlie's young, and I'll go bail he does better yet. From my recollection of all those cheery Hunt Steeplechases, the young ones were very apt to get a little the worst of it at first, but a few years' practice and they turn the tables. There is no truer adage, Mr. Furzedon, than that youth will be served. I don't call myself an old woman, and never mean, but if you ask me whether Lettie can walk me down—well—I suspect she can."

"No," said Furzedon; "nobody ever does grow old in these days. Why look at all our leading public men—boys still, in spite of what their baptismal registers assert to the contrary. By the way, Miss Devereux, have you seen anything of the Kynastons since you have been in town?"

"Not as yet," rejoined Lettie, "but I have only been here three days as yet. In fact, I am rather surprised at your having heard of my arrival."

"Well," replied Furzedon, "that is a pure piece of good fortune on my part. I remember that you said in the winter you very often spent a few weeks with Mrs. Connop about this time of the year, so I thought I would call."

"Charlie tells me you have done with Cambridge."

"Yes," rejoined Furzedon; "I never intended to take a degree, but my guardians were right—it is good for a man to go to the University for a time. It opens his eyes, and gives him a glimpse of the world."

Mr. Furzedon's guardians were shadowy people to whom he only alluded when it suited his purpose. They had interfered very little indeed with him, and the going to Cambridge had been entirely his own idea, and of his object in doing so we are already aware. He had been, moreover, of age now some little time, and was consequently emancipated from the very light control his guar-

dians had ever attempted to exercise. After a little more desultory talk, Mr. Furzedon rose to take his leave, and received from Mrs. Connop, as he did so, a cordial intimation that she would be glad to see him whenever he chose to call. He had also learnt from Lettice that the Kynastons had taken a house in Chester Street, Mayfair.

"Not a bad beginning," thought Mr. Furzedon, as he strolled eastwards. "I've got my foot fairly inside that house, and it will be my own fault if I don't establish myself on Mrs. Connop's visiting list. Mrs. Kynaston, too, can be a very useful woman to me if she likes. I don't suppose that they entertain much, but I fancy they have a very numerous acquaintance in London, and that Mrs. Kynaston could introduce one pretty widely if she chose."

VIII.—LADY RAMSBURY'S GARDEN PARTY.

MORE hospitable people than the Ramsburys never existed. They lived in a great red brick house in Chelsea—one of those modern imitations of the old Elizabethan style of house such as you may see in Pont Street. It stood in the midst of a large garden, and the Ramsburys delighted in big dinners during the winter months, and in large garden-parties in the summer. What Sir John Ramsbury had been knighted for was rather a mystery. He was known as a "warm" man in the City, was Alderman of his Ward, and though he had never passed the chair, it was always regarded that was an honour he might aspire to any day. However, he had attained the distinction of knighthood, the why could be only explained otherwise than that he had been the chairman of several commercial enterprises, supposed to have resulted in much benefit to the country, and, what was rather more to the point, in considerable benefit to Sir John Ramsbury.

Lady Ramsbury's "gardens" were a well-known feature in the London season. The company might be a little mixed, but there were plenty of right good people always

to be found there. Sir John, as director of various companies, had come across a good deal of the salt of this earth, and in this latter half of the nineteenth century, when the struggle for existence waxes harder and harder, both to those with the bluest of blood in their veins and to those born in the gutter, the man with the capability of putting money into his friends' pockets is a power.

There has never been a time when fashion in pursuit of its follies did not grovel at the feet of Plutus. How our neighbours bowed down at the shrine of Law, and many of us can remember when to sit at the table of the Railway King was matter of gratulation to half the best society in London. Who could whisper such auriferous secrets into dainty ears as he could? and though irreverent guardsmen might put up their glasses at some of the social solecisms he was wont to commit, yet their seniors and the mothers that bore them were too worldly-wise not to overlook such trifles as those. In similar fashion, Sir John Ramsbury commanded a considerable number of guests at his parties. He did the thing right well; there was never any lack of everything of the best in the commissariat department at his parties, and it must, in justice to the worthy knight and his lady, be added that they were unconventional people, but by no means vulgar. Lady Ramsbury and Mrs. Connop were old friends; the lamented Connop had been mixed up with various business speculations in Sir John's early days, before he blossomed into knighthood and the dignity of a house at Chelsea, so that there was nothing singular in Lettie and her aunt finding themselves in that pleasant old garden one fine June afternoon.

After shaking hands with their hostess Mrs. Connop and her niece began to slowly pace the lawn. They met plenty of acquaintances, and were enjoying themselves in a careless, gossiping way, when Lettie's eye was caught by a group of three people who were occupying a garden-bench, and conversing somewhat earnestly. The centre of the group, and the person who had first attracted her attention, was a slight, elderly man, with a decided stoop, and an eye like a hawk. Seated on one side of him was a stout elderly lady, richly dressed, but who evidently con-

sidered that Nature was a handmaid to Art. The merest tyro would have known her colour was not that of fresh air and superabundant life, and made a shrewd guess that her exuberant tresses came straight from her hairdresser's. But Lady Melfort was a well-known and very popular person. Ascot or Newmarket, Epsom or Doncaster, would have seemed incomplete without the presence of that dashing and evergreen Countess. On the other was Gilbert Slade. As far as Lettie could see, the conversation rested principally with the lady, who was declaiming volubly, while Norman Slade, who was the central figure of the group, merely threw in an interjectional word now and again.

Norman Slade had no objection to fighting the Turf battles of bygone days over again with any one who really understood racing, and the sporting Peeress, who was a thorough enthusiast, was by no means a bad judge.

"I don't agree with you, Lady Melfort," he ejaculated, in reply to some story of her ladyship's, the gist of which appeared to be that she had lost her money when she thought she ought to have won it. "It is true, in his previous form, the horse ought to have won, but it by no means follows there was any foul play connected with his running; horses, like ourselves, are not always quite themselves, and the cleverest trainer sometimes fails to detect that his charge is a little off. I know that people connected with Lucifer backed him upon that occasion."

"I should like to know what his jockey did," rejoined her ladyship, sharply.

"His best, I think," rejoined Norman; "he's a steady, civil boy enough, and we are rather too apt to make the jockey answerable for the shortcomings of the horse."

But her ladyship was evidently not convinced, she was given to be somewhat suspicious of unfair play when her racing calculations proved fallible.

At this juncture Gilbert caught sight of Miss Devereux, and, as he was by no means such an enthusiast about the "sport of kings" as his companions, he at once raised his hat and proceeded to join her.

"How d'ye do, Miss Devereux? Rather different

weather from that when I last saw you. How long have you been in town?"

"Only about a week," rejoined Lettie; "but let me introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Connop, with whom I am staying."

Gilbert bowed, and muttered something about "doing himself the pleasure of calling;" and then turning to Lettie, said, "I suppose now you'll see the season out."

"Oh, yes," replied the girl. "I want to go everywhere and do everything, see all there is to be seen, and meet all my friends. I suppose, Mr. Slade, that your intentions are somewhat similar."

"Ah! it doesn't signify what my intentions may be. When you're a soldier you find the Horse Guards interfere with such things in ruthless fashion. No, I regret to say that I only got a month's leave, and that half of it is already gone. Has Pole Star won his spurs yet, Miss Devereux?"

"No," rejoined Lettie; "how can you recall that day of disgrace to me?"

"Not disgrace," rejoined Gilbert; "you were defeated, as we all are at times; but I fancy if the race had been run over again your brother would have made a closer thing of it."

"Ah! I daresay Charlie will have another opportunity of distinguishing himself in the autumn. Is there any likelihood of your being present at the Autumn Meeting on the Carholme?"

"It is very likely," rejoined Gilbert. "I am quartered at York, and I should think it is easy to slip down from there. However, it is a long way off as yet."

"Who was that gentleman you were talking to, Mr. Slade?" inquired Miss Devereux.

"That was my Uncle Norman," replied Gilbert. "It is not often that he leaves his usual haunts for anything of this sort; but, for some reason, he is very fond of the Ramsburys—he has known them a good many years; and I've a vague suspicion that Sir John did him a kindness at some period of his life. All I know is that, though he is a real good fellow, my Uncle Norman is peculiar, and it is

by no means every one that could lure him to their dinner-table; not many people, I fancy, who would have got him to do a thing of this kind."

"I am sure it is charming," replied Miss Devereux, laughing; "such pretty grounds, so many people, and such a good band to listen to; I don't think your good uncle is much to be pitied."

"No," said Gilbert; "but people differ in taste, and this is not much in my Uncle Norman's line." And the conversation turned upon military affairs; for, not a little to Gilbert's surprise, Miss Devereux manifested no small curiosity anent "soldiering." It was easy of explanation. During the winter she and her brother Charlie had had many a talk together as to what line of life he was to pursue, and he had more than once spoken seriously of the army as a profession calculated to suit him when his career at Cambridge was done with. Lettie warmly approved of that determination. She had a very vague idea of what a soldier's life was like; but thought that a man who was a good horseman ought to make a likely Dragoon.

Norman Slade continued to talk in his lazy way to Lady Melfort. The Countess always amused him, while he usually acted as a pleasing irritant upon her. He listened to her vehement protestations of the iniquities of the Turf with a quiet smile, and invariably exasperated her by claiming a high position for the main part of those connected with it, and declaring that people who lose a little money shrieked and made bitter wail over the treachery that they had encountered, forgetting about the extreme uncertainty that distinguishes racing beyond even most mundane affairs.

"My dear Countess," he would say, "you don't rail against M. Blanc when you lose your money at Monte Carlo, and yet when you come to gambling on the Turf—and you know, Lady Melfort, you are a gambler—you don't bet merely upon the races you understand and can form an opinion about, but you bet on all sorts of handicaps and selling races, of which, concerning the merits of the competitors, you know nothing."

"Well, I hate to see a race, Mr. Slade, without having something on it."

"Just so," rejoined Norman; "then you couldn't bear to see the ball spinning round at Monte Carlo without having a stake on it, and, whether you back the red or the black, it is just about as great a lottery as some of these races you speculate on."

If Norman somewhat irritated her, Lady Melfort had a profound respect for his judgment. She believed him to be able to elucidate many a Turf mystery that had puzzled racing people profoundly, and in this she was right; there were few men perhaps more behind the scenes than Norman Slade. There were not many Turf robberies of which he could not explain the history. Pray don't think for one moment he was a participator in them. Like the general public, he had occasionally been a victim; but when the scandal connected with such events was once blown over, a story in Turf circles is pretty certain to leak out in more or less accurate form, and he sometimes regaled Lady Melfort with the true history of one of these bygone surprises. Like many men of his type, good-hearted fellow though he was at bottom, he would hardly have interfered to save any one in whom he was not interested from being awfully taken advantage of

"It is wonderful," he was wont to say, "the amount of foolishness there is in this world, and, as regards racing, the man who undertook the task of being guardian to the dovecot would have a thankless and onerous office. These 'squabs,' if they have any independence, emerged from the parental dwelling with a complacent self-sufficiency no warning could disturb."

He would have interfered fast enough on behalf of his favourite nephew had he seen occasion, but Gilbert was a man quite able to take care of himself, and with no taint of gambling in his blood. Norman in his varied life had seen young men come to grief from various causes, and had more than once, at the instigation of anxious relatives, interfered in their behalf. One rule he always firmly adhered to. "Don't ask me," he would say, "to meddle in the affairs of a young gentleman who is going down hill at a

hand gallop. I don't like young gentlemen—their talk bores me, and they don't like me. They are sure not to take my advice, and call me an old fogey, I have no doubt, when my back is turned. However, when your hopeful has gone a 'real perisher' I will step in, if you wish it. The young man in difficulties, and the young man with his quill feathers still unplucked, are very different people to deal with."

Miss Devereux and Gilbert Slade continued to improve their acquaintance during the best part of the afternoon. The young lady had not a very numerous acquaintance present, and was not at all averse to having this good-looking Hussar dangling by her side. Gilbert thought her, as he well might, a very pretty girl. He had not been so much struck with her at Lincoln, but now she was arrayed in all her summer braveries he freely acknowledged her beauty, and, what was more to the point, her lively talk amused him. It was not that he did not know plenty of people, for many a fair head was bent in salutation to him as he paced the grass by Lettie's side, but Gilbert was too pleased with his present companion to seek for change—in fact, by the time he had put Mrs. Connop and her niece into their carriage it was quite arranged that he should call at Onslow Gardens the next day.

"She is rather a nice girl, that," mused Mr. Slade, as he paced homewards with a vigilant eye for a passing hansom, "besides, after the way in which her mother lunched me at Lincoln, I am bound to make my obeisance to the young lady and her aunt. What splendid brown eyes she has—and what a figure for a riding habit!"

I fancy those eyes had much to say to Gilbert's punctilious politeness, for had Miss Devereux been other than she was he would not so clearly recognised the necessity of calling in Onslow Gardens. He was a young man apt to be a little careless of such social obligations, but though very far from impressionable, he had always a genuine admiration for a pretty woman, and was fond of women's society. He differed from both his uncles in that respect, who, though leading very different lives, were alike in that

one thing—they both eschewed the society of the fair sex, except upon very rare occasions.

Miss Devereux, as she drove along, looked back on a very pleasant afternoon. "Charlie must be a soldier," she thought, "I rather like soldiers." And then Lettie could not help laughing as she considered how very limited her military acquaintance was—Mr. Slade, and two or three officers whom she had danced with at Hunt Balls—and had no recollection of being particularly impressed with them at the time. She was conscious herself that she was basing her predilections for the army entirely upon Gilbert Slade, whom, after all, she had only met three times. Major Kynaston, who was the only soldier of whom she had much knowledge, she undoubtedly had but little admiration for, but then she decided in her own mind that he was probably an unfavourable specimen.

Suddenly Mrs. Connop exclaimed, with some abruptness, "When did you hear from Charlie last?"

"Oh, not for some days."

"Where do you suppose he is?" inquired her aunt.

"He is sure to be at Cambridge."

"I don't think he is, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Connop. "I forgot to tell you, but when I was out shopping this morning, Charlie passed me in a hansom cab, unless I am very much mistaken."

"Did he see you, auntie?"

"No; of that I am quite sure. It is very odd he should be in town and not come out to see me."

Miss Devereux made no reply. It was not very likely that her aunt was mistaken, and she knew that Mrs. Connop much resented any of her family not duly presenting themselves in Onslow Gardens on such occasions, while Lettie was also aware that young gentlemen at the University were not uncommonly in London without the knowledge of their relations. She kept her misgivings carefully to herself, but from a little that had escaped Charlie in the winter she felt pretty sure that there were money troubles impending over his head, and that the storm was likely to burst at any moment.

IX.—A LITTLE GAME AT BILLIARDS.

IT is a curious thing, but it is nevertheless most generally the case, that when a young gentleman gets into difficulties he is apt to bestow his confidence, and take advice, in all probability, from the very last man he should select. To go to the home authorities, undoubtedly the best people in whom to confide until by repetition their patience has been exhausted, is about the last thing that occurs to many of us in those days of hot youth and difficulties. Charlie Devereux had got a bit dipped at the University, but it was not that which troubled him; he could have carried such debts as those straight to his father without fear of his reception. He might be called "an extravagant young dog," and there might be a good bit of grumbling over it, still he knew they would be paid. But Furzedon had gradually imbued him with a taste for racing and the backing of horses at Newmarket. Charlie was of far too impulsive a disposition ever to do much good in that way. A man may be a very fine horseman, or even more, he may be a very fair judge of racing, and yet have no manner of discretion in the backing of horses. Charlie in the first place had been indebted to Furzedon for the means with which to meet his liabilities, but as he got intimate with the Kynastons he was, like many another young man before him, very much impressed by the Major's apparent knowledge of the world.

The Major always did impose upon young men in this wise. A man who really does believe in himself is very apt to imbue his fellows with like belief, and, despite many rude shocks that should have shaken his opinion, Kynaston still prided himself upon his astuteness. There was not a "leg" at Newmarket that he was not more than a match for; the cleverest adventurer in London would never get the best of him at either the billiard or the card-table. As for the Stock Exchange, they knew a thing or two there, but they would have to get up very early in the morning to get the best of Dick Kynaston.

Dining at The Firs one night after a capital day's hunt-

ing, when the Major had suggested that just a couple of glasses of port apiece could not possibly hurt them after such a glorious gallop in the open, Charlie had made a clean breast of his troubles to his host. The latter listened with great interest. Young men's difficulties always had an interest for him. His knowledge of money-brokers and bill-discounters was extensive, and nobody understood the rights of salvage better than he did. He delighted in being hailed by the sinking ship when the skipper was young, and too thankful for his help to dream of disputing the price of his redemption. Very pretty pickings to be had in these cases, the Major knew. Of course there were others who must be permitted to share in the spoils; but the Major was a jackal of mark, and by no means, when the picking of the carcass took place, to be put off with bare bones.

He told Charlie that he had no doubt he could help him, but he would take a little time to consider of it, which, being interpreted, meant that Dick Kynaston intended leisurely to appraise his victim. It was not, remember, that he had won any money from Charlie, but that the latter had come to him with the story of his difficulties. When the Major came to consider the speculation, he considered it might probably turn out a profitable one. To begin with, the Devereux were unmistakably well-to-do people, and that, therefore, the money was certain to be all right in the long run—a thing that the gentleman to whom he meant to confide the relief of Charlie's necessities would be doubtless anxious about. Secondly, he thought there was nothing more probable than that from this, as yet, embryo North Leach stable might spring a dangerous steeplechaser or two, and to be behind the scenes in such a case might be the means of putting several hundreds into his pocket. Lastly, like Mr. Furzedon, Kynaston recognised that Charlie had the makings of a real horseman—a little green, perhaps, at present, but only wanting practice to develop into a first-class gentleman rider. Acting on all this, the Major had enabled Charlie to discharge his debt to Furzedon and save his hunters, but it had all been done in the usual way—bills of six months,

bearing ruinous interest, which Charlie had signed, with the Major's rollicking assurance ringing in his ears, of —“Pooh, my dear boy! we shall have one or two more rolls of the ball before these come due, and you'll probably win a nice little stake on one of the Spring handicaps, which will enable you to just light cigars with them.”

There are people who have broken the bank at Homburg, and I suppose there are people in Charlie's circumstances who have won enough money to discharge similar liabilities, but to the ordinary run of humanity such a thing never happens, and when it does I, in the superstition engendered by long years of watching the battle of the gambler with fortune, fear every gruesome fate for him. One I knew, who, after steadily plodding through years of ill luck on the Turf that might have deterred many men from continuing, at last had *his year*. He was no heavy gambler, but how much he won between the First Newmarket Spring and the finish of the Ascot week was preposterous, considering the stakes with which he originally started. That he had followed his luck there is no need to say, and had bet at Ascot in a way hitherto unknown to him; but it benefited him, poor fellow, but little, for ere the next twelve-month was over he was laid peacefully in his grave, and recked little of what went on on that Turf he had loved so dearly.

But those bills had at last become due, while that nice little stake which the Major had so jauntily predicted had not as yet been landed. Kynaston dropped a line to his young friend, and informed him that, unless he saw his way to meeting them, it was absolutely necessary he should come up to town and make arrangements for their renewal; and this it was that had brought Charlie Devereux to London. Kynaston determined to take advantage of the opportunity to give a little dinner to Devereux and Furzedon. The latter somewhat puzzled him. He was conscious that Furzedon was a shrewd young gentleman, though he would naturally have derided the idea of any one of *his years* getting the better of Dick Kynaston. A thing that had rather puzzled Furzedon had been where Charlie had procured the money to settle with him; but

the Major had cautioned Devereux to keep silence respecting those bill transactions, and, as Charlie had not volunteered any information, Furzedon could not, of course, press him on the subject. Kynaston was not given to entertaining, and, like one of his guests, usually had some object in view when he did extend his hospitality; but the tastes of young men who had either money or well-to-do relatives he always considered were worth studying. He had gathered up in the Wolds during the hunting-season that Charles, amongst other things, was a little proud of his billiard-playing, but at The Firs, and upon the two or three occasions that he had dined at North Leach, there had been no opportunity of testing young Devereux's skill in that particular.

The Major's off-hand invitations to dine with him at the Thermopolium were both accepted, although Furzedon pleaded, in consequence of another engagement, that he should have to run away soon after dinner was over. Major Kynaston could be a good host when he chose to take the trouble, and the trio, after a satisfactory repast, lingered for some time over their wine. At last Furzedon declared he must go, and after his departure Kynaston proposed that they should have a game of billiards with their cigar. Charlie was delighted with the proposition, and, having adjourned to the strangers' billiard-room, they commenced their game. They happened to have the room to themselves, and at first seemed evenly matched, but towards the middle of the game Charlie began to draw away from his opponent, and apparently won pretty easily at the finish. Kynaston seemed a little nettled at this, proposed another game of a hundred up, and offered to bet a crown he won it. He certainly made a better fight this time, but Devereux was once more victorious; still the Major declined to own himself defeated, and suggested another game for the same nominal stake. Devereux assented, and even offered to give a few points, which the Major testily declined. This time the scoring ran pretty even, when a stout gentleman, smoking a very large cigar, lounged into the room, nodded slightly to Kynaston, and, seating himself on the adjacent bench, proceeded to watch

the play. The arrival of the new comer seemed slightly to disconcert the Major, but at the same time, it seemed to have improved his play. A somewhat amused expression stole over the looker-on's face; and when Kynaston eventually proved the conqueror by a few points, he rose from his seat, and, as he sauntered out of the room, remarked,

"Hardly up to your usual form, Kynaston."

"Always the case," replied that gentleman, "when you drink champagne at dinner; you never can quite tell what the effect will be. You either play below your game, or a good many points above it."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Bob Braddock, for it was he who had been the amused spectator. "I don't know who that very young gentleman is," he muttered to himself as he left the room; "but if he thinks that he can form the slightest idea of Dick Kynaston's game of billiards from what he has seen to-night, he is very much mistaken. I don't suppose he has any conception that he has got hold of about the very best player we have got amongst us, and whom I don't suppose there are half-a-dozen gentlemen players in London can tackle."

Major Braddock was right; although Charlie was no fool, he had not the slightest idea, so well was it done, that Kynaston was concealing his game; he looked upon him as much such a player as himself; but thought that he was a little the best of the two. However, they played a couple more games upon even terms, and whatever Kynaston's object might have been, it was evident he had no design upon Charlie at present; for in one of these games he was easily beaten, and the other he just won by an apparent fluke. Nor did he make the slightest attempt to induce Charlie to bet further than the modest stake first proposed.

Whether Mr. Furzedon, if he had remained and witnessed the episode of the billiard playing, would have been much enlightened about his host's character, it is hard to say. Furzedon was very shrewd, no doubt, and it must be borne in mind a good five years Devereux's senior; but it is very difficult, indeed, knowing nothing of a good billiard-

player's game, to know whether he is doing his best, then, again, Furzedon had never set himself to study Major Kynaston. He knew that he was a sporting man, much addicted to horseracing, and he had little doubt with a taste for play; but he had never troubled his head to take further stock of him. He had dined with Kynaston at some little inconvenience, simply with the view of cementing the acquaintance commenced at North Leach; but it was to Mrs. Kynaston he looked principally to helping him in the main ambition of his life, namely, the working his way into London society. Mr. Furzedon had a high idea of utilising his fellows in anywise; but it had not so far struck him that the Major could be useful to him. He had not yet fathomed the vainglorious weakness of Kynaston's nature. The Major never could resist vaunting his triumphs when fortune favoured him, either on the baize or on the grass.

Young Devereux regained his quarters with all the complacency of a man who has spent a thoroughly satisfactory evening. He had had an excellent dinner, a good tussle at billiards with an opponent worthy of his steel, but of whom he firmly believed he had legitimately got the best, and, crowning mercy of all, the Major had told him those bills would be comfortably arranged for the present. It is true that there was something bitter within the cup, and, young and reckless as he was, even Charlie made a wry face at the price he was told he would have to pay for this further accommodation. Only he had a delicacy about it, he had far better have taken Furzedon into his confidence. Even if that gentleman had charged him interest for extending his loan, it would have been something bearing a very mild proportion to what his present benefactors required for their services. As Mrs. Connop rightly surmised, Charlie had not seen her. He was only up for two or three days, and did not particularly wish his relations to know of his presence in London, more especially Lettie. He was very fond of his sister, knew that her suspicions were already slightly aroused about the state of his affairs, and was not at all inclined to submit to her keen questioning. "No," he thought, "Lettie always could worm any-

thing out of me, and it's not a bit of use worrying her with this scrape, and she has all her life taken my troubles a deuced deal more hardly than I ever did myself. It is awkward, and if I can't win a race with Pole Star in the autumn I don't see my way out of it. But Lettie's a real good sort, and she shan't be bothered with my troubles so long as I can help it."

Miss Devereux, as we know, was already anxious about her brother, and had she known where to write to him would have communicated with him at once, but Charlie had not as yet attained to the dignity of a club, and though when in London he always encamped in the vicinity of St. James's Church, the precise street as well as number of the house were always uncertain. Duke Street, Ryder Street, Bury Street, Jermyn Street, etc., he had lodged in them all. At this time of year rooms in that locality were at a premium, and Miss Devereux knew that it was more a case of getting in where you could than where you chose. The only person she could think of likely to know Charlie's address was Mr. Furzedon, and that gentleman, whether he found people in or out, was much too wary not to leave his card on the hall table. Lettie accordingly dropped a line to Mr. Furzedon at the Parthian Club, asking for her brother's address, or, should he come across him that evening, would he tell him to call in Onslow Gardens.

It was late before Kynaston left the Thermopolium after his billiard tournament. He had accompanied Charlie down stairs, but at their foot encountered an old chum whom he had not seen for many years, had consented to turn into the smoking-room on the ground floor, and have just one small cigar and a chat over old times. Bidding Charlie good night, he did this "ancient mariner's" bidding, and ah me! how many of us can remember the dire headache that is the result of those chats about old times, how that small cigar and modest liquor accompaniment expands, and how "hearing the chimes at midnight" is a lukewarm jest in comparison with the chimes we do hear upon such occasion. It was very late indeed as Kynaston prepared to emerge from the wicket of the Thermopolium.

The big doors had been long since closed, and only that rabbit-like portal was open to the belated members. As the night porter unlatched it for him he handed him a mean and dirty-looking note, which, after one glance at the superscription, the Major thrust carelessly into his waistcoat pocket.

X.—IN ONSLOW GARDENS.

“NO, there’s not much difficulty about it, and from what you tell me, Miss Devereux, I should think it is the very profession to suit your brother. There is an examination to pass, of course; but most of us manage to do that after being sharpened up by a coach for a few months.”

“Yes; and Charles has had a University education,” replied the young lady.

“Ah! they don’t always bring much book-learning away from that,” rejoined Gilbert Slade laughing; “but they are not required to be so very deeply read to qualify for the service as yet. If your brother has made up his mind, he ought to lose no time about it. It’s a pleasant life enough. The one drawback about it is that it is not a money-making profession.”

“Well, Mr. Slade, I shall look to you to put us in the way of making Charlie a soldier.”

“I am afraid they won’t pay very much attention to the recommendation of a subaltern of Dragoons; but I might be of some use to you for all that, Miss Devereux. My uncle, familiarly known in the service as Bob Braddock. He was christened Henry, but a fellow who is good for anything always gets re-christened in his regiment. He is hand-and-glove with all sorts of swells, and a nomination for a commission is not much to ask for.”

“Ah! here comes Auntie!” exclaimed Miss Devereux, as her quick ear detected a hand upon the door-handle. “Not a word about my brother,” she added, hurriedly, in an undertone; “he is a little in disgrace just now.”

Mrs. Connop welcomed Gilbert cordially. She was fond of young men, and always did her best to make her house pleasant to them. She had a critical eye for masculine good looks, and Gilbert's tall muscular figure and dark, resolute face were of the type she most admired. There was a touch of romance about Mrs. Connop, with which only those who knew the good-tempered, vivacious lady intimately would have credited her.

Lettice understood her aunt thoroughly, and knew that she revelled in sentimental poetry; and that her eyes would even yet moisten over the perusal of a thrilling love-story.

"You have kept your promise, Mr. Slade," said Mrs. Connop, as she shook hands. "And you will be so far rewarded in that you will meet another of your sporting acquaintance in a quarter of an hour or so. I call them so," she continued, laughing, "for as far as I can make out, you, Lettie, and Mrs. Kynaston have only met on the racecourse."

"Not as yet," replied Slade; "but I trust it will be different in future. I'm not at all one of those men who spend the best part of their lives in the pursuit of racing."

"It is exciting," exclaimed Lettie; "remember what a fever we were all in about Charlie and Pole Star at Lincoln."

"Exciting? Yes," replied Gilbert, quietly, "you had special cause for it then. Nobody appreciates and enjoys a good race when it comes in my way more than I do; but it is not to me what it is to my Uncle Norman, for instance—the very breath of his nostrils."

"May one inquire, Mr. Slade, what are your tastes?" said Mrs. Connop.

An amused smile played upon Gilbert's mouth as he rejoined, "That is a question that can be answered from so many different points of view. Professionally, I should reply, military glory; diplomatically, that they are those of the lady I am talking to. Honestly, I should say, catholic in the extreme, as far as I know myself. I should say I have a keen appreciation of the best of everything there is going, whether it is hunting, shooting, travelling, sight-seeing, or whether it takes the baser form of mere eating and drinking."

"Ah, Mr. Slade," rejoined Lettie laughing, "I have some remembrance of that latter characteristic. I believe he was starving, Auntie, when father found him at Lincoln."

"Quite true, Miss Devereux. And I can never be sufficiently thankful that he did find us. Jocelyn and I were almost capable of devouring each other."

A peal on the knocker here heralded the arrival of Mrs. Kynaston, and in another minute that lady had glided into the room, shaken hands affectionately with Lettie, been presented to Mrs. Connop, and exchanged a cordial greeting with Gilbert Slade.

"Glad to catch you at last, Lettie, though you're one of the latest swallows that ever made a season. There's nothing new, there never is, you know, to an old Londoner like me; they may call it this, they may call it that, but it is always the old show dished up under a new name. However, it's all very pleasant, and I am enjoying myself as much as ever, and so will you. I heard by the purest accident in the Park this morning that you were at the Ramsbury's 'garden' yesterday. I don't know them myself, and have always understood they do the thing prettily."

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Mrs. Connop. "I don't care where it is, I think there are very few garden parties given in London where you will find the thing better done than it is at Chelsea Gate."

"Did you happen to be there, Mr. Slade?" inquired Mrs. Kynaston carelessly.

"Yes," replied Gilbert, "it was there I discovered Miss Devereux; and it is to that I owe the pleasure of meeting you again."

"Very nice of you to say so," replied Mrs. Kynaston; "and I shall only be too glad, as will my husband, if you can find time to honour us with a call in Curzon Street. How is Charlie, Lettie; has he done with Cambridge yet?"

Miss Devereux was slightly discomposed by this question. She detected a defiant sniff on the part of her aunt at once. She knew perfectly well that Mrs. Connop was already fuming because that erratic young gentleman had not paid his devoirs in Onslow Gardens. She had particu-

larly requested Gilbert to avoid alluding to him, and now Kate Kynaston had brought his name prominently forward.

"No," she replied, "I have not heard of him lately, but I believe he is still at Cambridge."

"Do you, Lettie?" said Mrs. Connop, sharply. "I feel pretty sure that he is at the present moment in London."

"You can't be sure, Auntie," rejoined Miss Devereux; "in such a city as this, I should think your double, or your treble, for the matter of that, might be about. It is so easy to make a mistake of that kind."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Kynaston, with some languid curiosity, "you think Mr. Devereux is in town, apparently, Mrs. Connop?"

"I don't think it—I know he is; and it's very rude of him not to call."

"Now, Mr. Slade," cried Lettie, "I appeal to you; don't you think it is very possible to make a mistake in the street, and fancy you've seen a person who is not within miles of London?"

"Certainly," rejoined Gilbert; "as a brother officer of mine remarked on this point, 'Fellahs are so confoundedly alike, you know, there is no knowing them apart; if they were only like horses, you know, dash it all, you couldn't make a mistake about 'em.'"

Mrs. Kynaston inwardly congratulated herself that she had been reticent of speech. It was in perfectly good faith that she had asked if he had done with Cambridge, as she knew that his time there was drawing to a close; but she certainly knew, further, that he had dined with her husband the previous night. That Charlie should be in London and his own sister not know of it puzzled her a little; but Mrs. Kynaston was not the woman to make mischief, and therefore passed Lettie's remark over in silence.

"Come and lunch with me to-morrow," she said, "all of you; and if your brother's shadow should take material form, I shall only be too pleased, Lettie, if you will bring him with you. We can have a real good talk then, and I shall be enabled to honestly make your acquaintance, Mrs. Connop. This afternoon I have half a dozen places

to go to, and have only time to shake hands and say how very pleased I shall be to see you again."

Mrs. Kynaston's invitation was gladly accepted; even Gilbert Slade thought luncheon with the sparkling, bonny brunette would be pleasant, and, as before said, he had an epicurean admiration for pretty women—though at the present moment he was regarding these two living, breathing models much as a man might regard a couple of pictures—still, they were pleasant to the eye, and afforded him that gratification that arrives to all of us from the contemplation of the beautiful. They were a striking contrast, but both very perfect in their way. Kate Kynaston's ebon locks, flashing dark eyes and well-rounded form was a pretty foil to the lithe figure, dark chestnut tresses and laughing brown eyes of her friend.

Mrs. Kynaston could not be said to puzzle her head much, but she did wonder a little what had brought Charlie Devereux to town in this somewhat mysterious way. She reflected, also, that her husband was not the man to throw dinners away, and that from those upon whom he bestowed his hospitality he was not so much apt to expect, but to feel certain, of receiving some return. What his object might be in entertaining Mr. Devereux Kate could not fathom; and she was still further bewildered as to what had led him to entertain Mr. Furzedon. About the latter Mrs. Kynaston had her own opinion; she might be somewhat of a Bohemian, but she had mingled too much with the best people not to know "good form" when she saw it, and her instinct told her that Furzedon was not quite a gentleman. He might pass as such with most men, but a well-bred woman would be sure to detect the base ring in the metal.

Still, that was no business of hers. The Major, as a rule, was a good husband in one respect. Considering in how many others he failed to deserve this definition, it was well that he should have something to the credit side of the ledger. He had scores of dubious acquaintances—men at whom society was wont to look somewhat askance, men of whom, to put it mildly, there were divers queer stories afloat—but, to do him justice, he rarely asked these

across his own threshold, nor was Mrs. Kynaston ever thrust into the slightest acquaintance with them. When it was absolutely necessary to his plans that such should make their objectionable appearance, they were relegated strictly to the Major's own den, and his wife knew no more than that "somebody on business" was closeted with him.

How very often invitations are either given or accepted which, on reflection, people feel to have been a great mistake, and Mrs. Kynaston's luncheon invitation had not long left her lips before she became conscious that this was not exactly what she wanted. There was no disguise about her being quite willing to entertain them all, but it suddenly occurred to her that she did not want to entertain them all at the same time, that to have a good gossip with Lettie she wanted that young lady all to herself! That a *tête-à-tête* with Gilbert Slade would be no doubt enjoyable, but would rather lose its flavour with Mrs. Connop and Miss Devereux being there to assist at it. There was nothing mean about Mrs. Kynaston. She was free-handed as an Arab in the matter of hospitality; her impromptu "little lunches" were usually successes, but on this occasion she felt that she had not picked her guests with her usual good judgment. However, she was too much a woman of the world to be disconcerted for a moment about a trifle like this. To recollect a previous engagement, which must necessitate the postponement of their contemplated banquet, was easy, and it was with many apologies to Mrs. Connop for having spoken so carelessly that Mrs. Kynaston took her departure. "It was very stupid of me, but really in the season no one should speak without looking at their engagement-slate, and I really had quite forgotten all about that water-party at the Fitzgerald's. I only wish, Lettie, they had too, but I've promised Mrs. Fitzgerald, and, as she has about the longest and bitterest tongue in all London, I daren't offend her. I don't know what crimes might not be laid at my door should I fail to put in an appearance. A line to the Thermopolium will, of course, always find you, Mr. Slade, and you must come and see me before you wend your way

northwards. For the present, good-bye to all of you." And then Mrs. Kynaston took her departure.

Gilbert soon followed her example, and had hardly left the house when Mrs. Connop exclaimed, with a snap that made Lettie start, "Now, what did she mean by that?"

"Mean! Who? What are you thinking of, Auntie?"

"Mrs. Kynaston! Why did she suddenly withdraw her invitation to lunch? Don't look so bewildered, child," continued Mrs. Connop, merrily. "It does not much matter, but I have mixed too much in the world not to know that to say one thing and mean another is by no means the exclusive privilege of politicians. The Fitzgeralds' water party! Rubbish! Doubtful whether there are any Fitzgeralds; bet any one Mrs. Kynaston is not going to them to-morrow. She's a very glib liar, Lettie; quite good enough to deceive any man, and most women; but I'm a solicitor's widow, my dear, and exceptionally gifted in the detection of false speech."

"Absurd, Auntie! You are too suspicious. Kate is as liberal a soul as ever lived, and little likely to be niggard of her wine or her cutlets."

"Nonsense! It's not that I mean. I have never seen Mrs. Kynaston before, but she changed her mind about having us to lunch. I feel quite sure of it. It is of no consequence, but I am curious about 'the why.'"

"You are prejudiced against Mrs. Kynaston," said Lettie.

"No, my dear, I am not; but it is no use pretending one does not take fancies or aversions at first sight. Dogs, acting up to the lights of their nature, often fight in real earnest on first meeting. Reason tells me I know nothing of Mrs. Kynaston. Instinct tells me to mistrust her."

"Oh, Auntie! She is one of my greatest friends," cried Miss Devereux.

"I trust I am wrong, and that you may never rue it. She's a very pretty, pleasant, lady-like woman, but for all that—— Well!

The reason why I cannot tell,
I do not like thee, Doctor Fell.

Say no more, child; but I don't take to Mrs. Kynaston.

XI.—A WAIF ON LIFE'S STREAM.

LET Dick Kynaston's habitation be where it might, one thing was always an imperative necessity. Most men affect more or less to have a sanctum of their own, but with Kynaston it was a *bona fide* den, into which even the housemaid was jealously admitted. It was furnished after the Major's own peculiar fancy, and tobacco and the Racing Calendar were predominant features in its arrangement. There the owner, seated at his writing-table, cigar in mouth, would pore for hours over volumes of the great Turf Lexicon, and make astounding calculations about weights, distances, and the varied running of horses. He was as great a votary of racing as Norman Slade; if he had not studied so long he had studied it quite as attentively; but there was this great difference between the two men: whereas the one loved it purely as a sport, and exulted in seeing a good horse win, the other regarded it much as one might the tables at Monaco; he looked upon it as a mere means of gambling, and would infinitely sooner have seen the good horse beaten had it profited him more. It is curious how this greed for money so constantly is, on the Turf, the cause of its pursuer's undoing. Is not the legend still extant of that luckless bookmaker who, after months of infinite patience and manipulation, had succeeded in getting his horse into the Chester Cup at a weight that made it a gift to him? Carefully was the commission worked, and he succeeded in plotting a *coup* that should have made him and his associates rich men for their lives. In a reckless moment, only a few days before the event was to come off, in his anxiety to let no money escape him, he laid the odds to lose ten thousand pounds against a horse, the owner of which had no intention up to that time of sending it to the banks of the Dee. Strange fatality! That very horse upset the deep-laid scheme by a neck, and turned the well-nigh mighty triumph into bitter defeat and disaster.

It was very rarely that any of Dick Kynaston's friends were made welcome to what was conventionally called

"the study." Nor was it exactly the room in which a man would elect to receive any one but an extreme intimate. In Curzon Street this sanctuary was simply the back dining-room, and after the books and cigar-boxes, the chief characteristics were a leathern armchair and a large, plain, substantial writing-table.

The Major had no connection whatever with literature, but he was certainly a man with very extensive correspondence. The letters he received and the replies thereto were generally of the briefest, and a great many of them were apparently from people to whom the handling of a pen was a strange and toilsome labour. Their spelling, like their caligraphy, was of a doubtful order. There was much uncertainty apparently amongst them as to the orthodox way of spelling "Major," and they discovered more varieties on that point than one would think so simple a title was capable of. These correspondents not uncommonly followed their letters. Quiet, unassuming people, as a rule; whose dress might prompt a well-drilled servitor to keep his eye on the umbrellas in the hall, but who otherwise were unmistakably business visitors; and they were a strange and curious lot, these jackals of the Major's.

It was a sad revelation of how educated men who have sunk beneath life's stormy waters are driven to get their living, to find that amongst this little band several of them were men well educated, and who once held a good position; ruined mostly by their own mad folly, they had descended to the depths of racecourse touts, or still more often had become the tools of the professional usurers, who in former days had helped them to their ruin. The Major himself, very indignant though he would have been had any one ventured to hint so, was simply one of these latter in a very large way of business. If he had burned his fingers considerably he had not come to utter financial grief. He had never forfeited membership of his clubs, he still held his own very fairly socially, and it was essential to his scheme of life that Mrs. Kynaston should take her place in the world, and be seen where that world of some ten thousand people do please to congregate. The difference between him and his *employés* is obvious. To the

well-dressed denizens of Clubland the spendthrift of family and expectations was easily accessible, which, of course, he was not to those more ragged of his brethren long since cast out from the gay scenes of their undoing. What hardly pressed young man would not welcome the prosperous gentleman in broadcloth and clean linen, who sympathised with his embarrassments over a cigar, and wound up by saying, "Deuce of a mistake, borrowing. But, Lord! what's the use of preaching! Young blood will run its course. I never argue with a man who *must* have money, unless he is trying to demonstrate the possibility of having it out of me. I'll give you a line to old Moggs if you like. He'll rob you, naturally—they all do. It's their trade, but he'll let you have it as cheap as any man in London."

Amongst Dick Kynaston's habitual visitors was that luckless individual who has already twice flitted across the pages of this narrative. We have seen him righteously struck to the earth by Furzedon outside the night-house in the Haymarket. Unjustifiable though the provocation was, as this story will show, it was questionable whether the striker had any right to deliver it. We have met him again as a mere racecourse tout at Lincoln Races, speaking in the slang vernacular of his tribe, and yet Prance was a man of good education, who had known a much better position, and who, though some years older than Ralph Furzedon, had been tempted by that precocious young gentleman to his undoing. How that happened will appear later; for the present it suffices to say that to Dick Kynaston he is a mere purveyor of racing intelligence, picked up it is impossible to say how, but at all times worth listening to, as the Major has discovered from experience. That there had ever been the slightest connection between Furzedon and Mr. Prance Kynaston was totally unaware. Had he been a spectator of that scene in the Haymarket no one would have been keener to know what called forth the final malediction launched against Ralph Furzedon, and what had been the previous relations between the pair to warrant the bitter intensity in which it was couched. The ordinary rough who, in his avocation of robbery, gets

knocked down, may swear a little, but takes it usually after the manner of his betters, as a mishap in the matter of business, but as we know the casual lookers-on had felt that no ordinary discomfiture in a street row could have brought forth the animosity concentrated in Mr. Prance's curse.

It is the morning after the Major's little dinner at the Thermopolium that, while engaged in those mystic calculations somewhat akin to the researches of the old alchemists in their untiring, though unavailing, endeavours to transmute baser metals into gold, the Major was informed that "a person" wanted to see him. Like the old alchemists, Kynaston had discovered that much more human but baser secret that it is quite possible to induce the weaker portion of humanity to part with their small store of wealth with a view to increasing it. Now, "a person to see you" is an announcement disturbing to a considerable portion of society generally. The "person to see you" is apt to be a very undesirable person to interview—apt to either want money in some form, or to be the bearer of disagreeable intelligence. We all know it except those affluent past redemption, and for whom some special paradise of their own must be preserved, or those, and they are a very limited number, whose record is so entirely blameless that they can laugh at the idea of the limelight being turned upon it. But the Major was used to this curt announcement. He neither dreaded that Miss Minnever had called to say that unless she had one hundred on Mrs. Kynaston's account she should be compelled to take legal proceedings; nor had he any fear of similar threats from creditors on his own account. Dick Kynaston was a business man in this wise: whatever he might have done once, he was a pretty rigidly ready-money man now. He made his wife a fairly liberal allowance, but he had given her pretty sharply to understand that this must never be exceeded.

Therefore this announcement brought no misgivings to his mind.

Another minute, and the servant had ushered into his room Mr. Prance.

"Well," said the Major, "what is it? Sit down, and

don't let us waste any time about it. We know one another pretty well now. If you merely want money, say so. You know I'm usually good for a trifle, and I will tell you at once what I can let you have. If you've brought me information, you know very well that you can trust me to pay for it, if I find it valuable."

"Well, Major," replied Prance, as he seated himself in a chair, "I've brought you a bit of Turf information which, I think, is worth your taking note of. I can't say it's valuable, probably never may be. You're a business man, and I don't expect you'll ever think you owe me anything on that account. I believe you were hunting up in the Wolds of Lincolnshire last year. Didn't you make the acquaintance of a Mr. Devereux? We both saw him ride at Lincoln, and, mind you, he will ride some day, but he's got to practise a bit yet. Now, I've heard something about that young gentleman. He's got into trouble a bit, and from the little that I can learn, is falling into about the worst hands that could happen to any young man starting in life."

It took a good deal to astonish the Major, but that Prance should be aware that he was mixed up in Charlie Devereux's affairs did surprise him. He hesitated a little before he made answer. It was scarcely likely that a man like Prance would presume to come and tell him to his face that he was no fit mentor for youth. Prance, with a direct pecuniary interest in keeping on good terms with him, was hardly likely to commit himself in this fashion. What did he mean? What did he know? What could the fellow be driving at?

"Yes," replied the Major, slowly, "I know Mr. Charles Devereux and all his people, but I am not aware that he has fallen into particularly bad hands."

"Did you ever come across a man of the name of Furzedon?" said Prance, lowering his voice.

"I know a *gentleman* of that name," replied Kynaston, as he rose from his chair and assumed a lounging attitude against the mantelpiece.

"*Gentleman!*" retorted the other with a bitter sneer. "You may call him that if you like. There's a good many

travel under that name who, if it means anything like straightforwardness and honesty, have little right to it. From the little I've seen, but more from what I've heard, I believe that Furzedon is a great friend of Mr. Devereux's."

"Mr. Furzedon, you mean," observed the Major, quietly.

"No, sir, I don't," rejoined Prance, doggedly. "I'll call him 'that Furzedon.' But if you're a friend of Mr. Devereux's tell him to take care of himself, for that he's intimate with as slippery a young scoundrel as ever trod the Heath at Newmarket."

"Surely Mr. Furzedon does very little in that way?"

"Look here, Major," said his visitor, "you go about a good deal, and are supposed to have cut your eye-teeth, just judge for yourself. Another hint, and it's worth a sovereign, too. I don't know what sort of a card-player you are, but if ever you take a hand with Furzedon, don't be too sure of getting the best of it."

"Ah," rejoined the Major, "I don't suppose that is very likely to happen, but it *is* worth a trifle to know that your antagonist is of the highest class when you sit down. Now you recollect what I asked you to find out if possible. Have you succeeded?"

"I don't know that I can quite say that," replied Prance, diffidently, "and I shall have to write to you again on the subject; still, as far as I can make out, they have got no first-class two-year-old in the Northern stables."

"All right," replied the Major, as he handed the tout a gratuity. "If you discover one later on, you must let me know. And now, good-bye," and a curt nod of dismissal indicated to Mr. Prance that his audience was terminated.

"Ah," said the Major to himself, after his visitor had left the room, "I was somewhat deceived in that young man. I did not think him a fool, but I had no idea he was so precociously clever. I must study him a bit. I wonder how much he has had to say to young Devereux's losses? I shouldn't wonder if my friend Prance knows an ugly story or two about him, the possession of which would render him very amenable to reason if he and I should ever happen to differ. And it's a quarrelsome world," mused the Major,

“and men lose their temper as often as they do their money, and sometimes, sad to say, both simultaneously.” Mr. Prance’s hint was quite a revelation to the Major. He had regarded Furzedon as a quiet, tolerably well-mannered young man, not at all likely to exhibit speculative tastes, but, according to this informant, Mr. Furzedon was an exceedingly astute young man, with a decided taste for gambling in every form. Dick Kynaston had been brought up too much amongst “the right people” not to detect that there was a clash of Brummagem about Ralph Furzedon. He was a very good imitation, but the initiated could not fail to see that he was not quite genuine. The base coin appears good money to the eye, but it won’t ring, it jars upon the ear when put to that test, and similarly Furzedon, though at first he thoroughly passed muster, when you came to associate with him jarred a little on the feelings. You couldn’t quite indicate the flaw, but you felt intuitively that he was not quite a gentleman.

Suddenly a thought flashed across the Major’s mind. A confederate might be useful in many of the transactions in which he was habitually engaged, especially a confederate over whom he had a hold. And this, he thought, through Prance very possible in the case of Ralph Furzedon. There was plenty of time to make inquiries, for he had no particular scheme on foot at the present moment that required a coadjutor. The Major then seated himself at his writing table, and made some brief and mysterious memoranda in his betting book, without which volume, unless perchance it had been in his bath, Dick Kynaston had for years never been met with.

XII.—BOB BRADDOCK’S CONDITIONS.

“SO I’m to be civil to Mr. Furzedon, am I?” mused Mrs. Kynaston, as she sat in her pretty drawing-room the day after her meeting with Miss Devereux. “Now I wonder what that means. Dick never gives me those

instructions without a reason. I don't particularly fancy Mr. Furzedon myself; I wonder what Lettie thinks of him. She had ample opportunity of studying him during the month he was at North Leach; however, as she is coming to lunch here, I shall have an opportunity of ascertaining."

Miss Devereux was true to her appointment, and the two ladies sat down to their meal *tête-à-tête*. After gossiping gaily over various subjects, Lettie asked her friend whether she thought there was any chance of their taking The Firs again next winter.

"I am sure I can't say," replied Mrs. Kynaston. "You see men like my husband now and then don't hunt at all. Dick will race, and there are bad years as well as good ones at that amusement; and then we can't afford horses. The Firs is a cheap place, but I don't think Dick quite liked it. He prefers a more thickly populated neighbourhood. By the way, have you seen anything of that Mr. Furzedon who was staying with you last winter?"

"Oh, yes; he called the other day. He has quite done with Cambridge, you know, now, and is settled in London."

"Yes," replied Kate, "I have an idea he is trying hard to push his way into London society. What did you think of him, Lettie?"

"He made himself very pleasant while he was with us—was very good-natured, and seemed to enjoy himself."

"All of which, my dear," said Mrs. Kynaston, laughing, "does not give me the slightest insight into what you think of him. Do you consider him quite good form? Is he of the same stamp as Mr. Slade, for instance?"

"No," rejoined Miss Devereux, quickly; "but he is a soldier, and there is something different about soldiers, you know. I am so anxious that Charlie should become one. He is much too fond of hunting to become a clergyman, and I'm sure he would never do any good as a barrister, and he must be something."

"Quite so," replied Mrs. Kynaston, with mock gravity; "men must be something, if it is only to keep them out of mischief, and they don't always do that. Charlie would make a very dashing Hussar; and I ought to be a judge, for I knew the ringing of bits and bridles well in my early

married days. Dick didn't sell out for a couple of years after we married. Mr. Slade *is* good-looking," she continued, after a momentary pause. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes," rejoined Lettie; "it is one of those dark, handsome faces we are all apt to go wild about."

"He can be very agreeable, too, when he likes. I hope you found him so the other day at Lady Ramsbury's."

"Very much so," replied Miss Devereux. "I am glad to say that there is a chance of your seeing a little of him next winter."

"How so?" inquired Mrs. Kynaston.

"His regiment has been moved up to York, and the Dragoons from there often come down to our county balls; besides, he has declared that he will come down and see Pole Star run at Lincoln in the autumn."

Mrs. Kynaston cast one quick look at her companion, and wondered how far she and Mr. Slade were interested in each other. Kate Kynaston felt almost inclined to resent this idea. She had commenced a slight flirtation with Gilbert at Lincoln; and when Mrs. Kynaston did that, she was wont to regard a man as her own peculiar property, and looked for unswerving allegiance on his part. Like many women of her type, she was very good-tempered and pleasant till you happened to interfere with any of her schemes or caprices: and then one who should have known her well—for had he not been in the toils?—said,

"You may look out for squalls; you've got one of the cleverest women in England against you, and it's long odds she carries her point, more especially if she *is* playing against a man."

Gilbert Slade is lounging in the smoking-room of the Thermopolium with a view to, if possible, catching hold of Major Braddock. He had promised to consult his uncle as to whether he could assist young Devereux to a nomination for the army, a fact which, when it came to Mrs. Kynaston's ears, disconcerted that lady not a little. She argued that when men exert themselves to assist young ladies' brothers, they, at all events, have considerable admiration for the young lady herself; and Mrs. Kynaston, upon very insufficient grounds, considered that Gilbert had

no business just at present to admire anybody but herself. She need not have perturbed herself, that *insouciant* Hussar thought of his two recent acquaintances only as a couple of pretty, agreeable women; but he certainly did go this length, that of the two he preferred Miss Devereux. No very great preference, perhaps, but still such it was as far as it went. It would have angered both ladies to know that what occupied his mind at the present moment much more than their fair selves was the nuisance of having to go back to York. York was all very well when you came to the grouse time, the races, and the hunting; but York during the London season was unendurable. He loathed the loud blare of the barrack-yard; he knew how hot and dusty Cony Street would be, everybody would be away, and an evening country ride without any object was not much for a man to look forward to. "No wonder," he muttered, "we soldiers drink a good deal of claret, and rather stiffen our joints at whist in these dull country quarters. What a deuce of a bore it is having to go back."

When his uncle entered the smoking-room he at once confided his grievances to him; but that veteran simply "D—d his impudence," and called him a discontented young dog. "By Jove, sir," he said, "it would do you a lot of good to get a good rattling Irish out-station. I had one once myself. My troop was detached from Dundalk; there wasn't a soul to speak to, and as for dining, I didn't do such a thing for four months;" and the Major quite shuddered at the hardships he had undergone upon that occasion.

"It's a wonder you ever pulled through," said Gilbert, laughing.

"I don't know that I should have done so," replied his uncle, twinkling his eye, "if I hadn't made friends with the priest. He had some marvellous whiskey, and was the only man I ever met who could really brew whiskey punch. By Jove, sir, I lived upon it. He taught me to play spoiled five, and I'd just get through the evening that way till the cards began to get hazy, and I felt it was time to go home. It's a beautiful game, spoiled five; but his reverence used to take the sixpences out of me amazingly,

and I dare say he played a better game; but I know he had a better head for punch."

"You think he rather rooked you, then," said Gilbert.

"Pooh, nonsense! we played for merely nominal stakes; but Father O'Shea was a keen card-player, and, like Mrs. Battle, loved the rigour of the game. I was generally foggy towards the end of the proceedings."

"I say, uncle," said Gilbert, quietly, "you've lots of interest, you know, at the Horse Guards; do you think you could get a nomination for a commission for a young fellow in whom I am interested?"

"Young fellow in whom you are interested; friend of yours, I presume?"

"Well, I can't exactly say that," rejoined Slade; "for the fact is I barely know him."

"Then what the deuce do you mean," rejoined the Major; "you can't expect me to go bothering at the Horse Guards to ask favours for your slight acquaintances."

"Well," rejoined the Hussar, coolly, "his sister is a deuced nice girl, and I've promised to do what I can to help her in this matter."

Major Braddock's sole reply was a low chuckle and an expressive wink. The suspicion of a sentimental affair was apt to arouse the mirth of that *bon vivant*, who believed in nothing but sensual gratification.

"I say, Bertie, my boy, spoons at your time of life is only natural. You will find out the vanity of it before you're much older. Only, as far as my authority goes, and remember you'll have a good bit of my dollars when I go, I bar matrimony before you've got your troop. If you don't think you're better as a bachelor, then please yourself. I've nothing more to say against it."

"Your warning is quite uncalled for," rejoined Gilbert Slade. "One may like and admire a girl without the slightest thought of marrying her. Besides, I am quite of your opinion. It ought to be made illegal for subalterns to marry. But will you help me in this matter?"

"I can't say. You admit you know nothing about this young fellow. I've no doubt his sister is a nice, ladylike girl. You are not likely to make a mistake about that.

But the prettiest and nicest of them are sometimes cursed with the most objectionable brothers."

"I can assure you young Devereux will pass muster."

"Not a bit of use, Master Bertie. I am not begging till I have seen him. I've too great a regard for Her Majesty's service to inflict upon any regiment a youngster whom his brother officers might feel ought never to have been amongst them. Let me see him, and then, if I conscientiously can, I'll do my best for him."

"I am afraid there will be some little difficulty about that," said Bertie, meditatively.

"I can't help it," replied the Major, testily. "I have told you I won't back a dark horse. You surely can't be afraid to show him, because that's enough to d—— him at once."

"Nonsense, Uncle Robert; it's not that. The slight difficulty is this: that he is at the present moment at Cambridge, and I don't know whether he can get away; while at the same time my leave is running out, and I must return to York. Of course, I can say nothing until I have seen Miss Devereux; but I don't quite see my way into bringing you together before the end of the season. And when I'm in town in the winter you are as likely as not to be staying at some country house or another."

"Can't be helped, Bertie," returned the Major, doggedly, "as I said before, I'll see him before I back him. How it is to be managed is your business; but if you ask us to meet at dinner, for goodness' sake, my dear boy, let me run my eye over the *menu*. Boys of your age never understand eating.

Man may live without love—what is passion but pining?
But where is the man that can live without dining?

There was no more poetry in the Major than in an oyster, and I question much whether he knew anything about "Owen Meredith's" poem as a whole, but that one passage he certainly had by heart—he thoroughly endorsed every line of it, and was rather given to quoting it.

Gilbert felt there was no more to be said. His uncle had delivered his ultimatum, and the bringing of Charlie

and Major Braddock together he felt could only be compassed after consultation with Miss Devereux. He nodded to his uncle as the latter left the room, and continued to smoke on in silent meditation. He had, at all events, successfully accomplished the first step. He had no fear but what Charlie Devereux would pass muster with the Major, and the veteran had given his word to interest himself in his behalf should that be the case.

It must be remembered that the days of which I am writing were before the time of competition, when a nomination for a regiment held good, providing you passed a certain specified examination, a more practical test to my mind than the present system, which is calculated to furnish the army with excellent linguists and arithmeticians, but not quite the best stuff from which soldiers are made. I am afraid this higher knowledge is of little account in the field, however telling it may be in the class-room. There was a hero who won the V.C. scarce a decade ago, whom rumour declared had been twice "plucked" in one of the ceaseless examinations that now dog the steps of the unfortunate British officer, but he had great determination, quickness, and grit, which served him in better stead that day than science or tactics.

The one thing quite clear to Gilbert Slade is that he must see Miss Devereux without loss of time, and accordingly, as soon as it became near the canonical hour for calling, he wended his way towards Onslow Gardens. He arrived there somewhat early, but he did this with intention, as he honestly wanted to get in. To his enquiry as to whether Mrs. Connop was at home, he received an answer in the affirmative, and was duly ushered up stairs. To his dismay he found that estimable lady alone, and after the warning he had received the other day from Miss Devereux, he knew that it would be imprudent to ask her for her nephew's address. However, there could be no harm in asking after Lettie, and his mind was considerably lightened when he ascertained that that young lady was not only in, but would probably be down in a few minutes.

"She is just putting on her bonnet, Mr. Slade, as we are

going over to Lady Ramsbury's for a cup of tea, and intend to have a turn in the Park afterwards."

A few minutes' lively conversation, for Mrs. Connop was by no means one of those women whom talking to becomes painful and wearisome labour, and then Lettie entered the room, looking, as Slade thought, handsomer than he had ever seen her yet. She greeted Gilbert with much cordiality, and then, to Slade's great relief, Mrs. Connop got up, and said, laughingly :

"I must leave you to take care of Mr. Slade, Lettie. I am sure you will excuse me for a few minutes," she added, turning to Gilbert, "but I also must array myself for our drive."

"I wanted much to see you alone for a few minutes, Miss Devereux," said Gilbert, as the door closed. "I have lost no time in seeing if I could be of any assistance to your brother in obtaining a commission. Now, my uncle, popularly known as 'Jolly Bob Braddock,' can, as I told you, help him if he chooses, and he has promised he will if he likes him."

"Likes him!" repeated Lettie. "But that is rather a doubtful thing."

"You don't know the Major, and therefore you can't quite understand. He is straight as a die, but he won't exert his influence to procure a commission for any young fellow whom he does not consider pleasant and a gentleman—in short, he insists upon seeing him."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Lettie with a comic expression of despair, "this is terrible. It's worse than going in for his 'smalls.'"

"Nothing of the kind," replied Gilbert. "There will be no trouble about it if I can only get hold of your brother at once, and induce him to meet my uncle at the Thermo-polium. As long as his dinner is all right—and as we have agreed that he is to have the ordering of it, it will be hard lines if it isn't—Charlie will pass muster triumphantly, and, I hope, spend a pleasant evening. But, you see, my time in London is limited, and the question is, Can he get away from Cambridge?"

"He is away, Mr. Slade; I believe him to be in London

at this minute, though I don't know his address; but I think it very possible I may in the course of the day. I have written to a great friend of his, who is pretty certain to know where he is staying, and I will let you know the moment I hear. He is very keen upon this army idea, and, I am sure, would make a great effort in answer to your kindness, and it really is very, very kind of you, Mr. Slade, to have taken so much trouble for people of whom you know so little as you do of us."

"That is a fault to be amended, Miss Devereux," rejoined Gilbert. "You cast your bread upon the waters that bitter afternoon at Lincoln, and won undying gratitude from a half-famished man."

"It is very good of you to make so little of the service you are rendering us." And as Lettie spoke, the door opened, and Mrs. Connop sailed into the room.

Gilbert felt that his mission was accomplished, and though he would willingly have prolonged the *tête-à-tête*, there was nothing left him now but to put the ladies into their carriage and take his departure.

XIII.—SEEKING A COMMISSION.

MR. FURZEDON was a little puzzled on the receipt of Miss Devereux's note. There was no difficulty about giving Charlie's address, but it was just possible that young gentleman, for the day or two he was in town, might not care about seeing his relations. What had brought him up Furzedon did not know; he had no opportunity of private conversation with him at Dick Kynaston's dinner, but he did know that unless the University had intimated that they could dispense with Mr. Devereux's presence for some time, or even altogether, that his stay in London must be very short. However, after a few minutes' consideration, it was obvious to him that the best thing to do would be to consult Charlie himself on that point. That young gentleman, as soon as he had read the note,

observed, "All right, I didn't mean going to Onslow Gardens, but Lettie is a clear-headed girl, and wouldn't particularly want to see me unless she had a good reason for it. I had no idea my respected aunt knew I was in town, or else I should have gone up there yesterday. Mrs. Connop has a great idea as to what is due to her, from her nephews and nieces, and, as she is a regular trump, I wouldn't offend her for the world."

"You'd be a precious fool if you did," rejoined Furzedon. "She's good, no doubt, for many years to come, but she has money to leave behind her whenever she makes an end of it."

"I wasn't thinking of that," rejoined Charlie, curtly. "I only remembered she was always a jolly kind aunt to me from my school-boy days, when she used to take me to the pantomime, till last winter, when she gave me a cheque for 50*l.* to buy another hunter with."

"I see," replied Furzedon, "one of those beneficent god-mamas that only exist in fairy tales. This is the first I ever heard of in real life."

"Perhaps not. I fancy Aunt Connop is a sort you don't often come across."

"Well, good morning," rejoined Furzedon. "I shall write a line to Miss Devereux to say that you'll be in Onslow Gardens this afternoon. An independent aunt who is lavish of cheques for fifty is a relative to cling to, take my word for it."

Charlie's appearance in Onslow Gardens that afternoon speedily made his peace with Mrs. Connop. With that lady, indeed, he was an especial favourite. She liked him better considerably than his steady-going brother, and, though very fond of Lettie, perhaps cared more about the scapegrace of the family than her niece. Charlie had never done anything very terrible, but he had a knack—some men have—of being incessantly in scrapes. He had never come actually to grief, but from his earliest days he had occasioned considerable anxiety to his family by perpetually hovering on the brink of it. Lettie was his most trusted counsellor, and in small financial muddles, at her instigation, Mrs. Connop had more than once come to the

rescue. Clear-headed Lettie saw that with a nature like her brother's the sooner he was set to some serious work the better. She knew he was doing no good at the University, and she was now very hot upon his getting into the army as soon as possible. You can't keep a man in leading strings, but to let him saunter through life with no occupation is bad for any, destruction to some.

The preliminary greetings over, Lettie plunged at once *in medias res*, and had the satisfaction of finding both her auditors thoroughly with her. Mrs. Connop was as keen that Charlie should enter the army as he was to get into it, and said that, to see her nephew a Dragoon, she would not at all grudge contributing handsomely towards his outfit. And then she went on to tell Charlie how she had persuaded Mr. Slade to ask his uncle, Major Braddock, to interest himself in his—Charlie's—favour, and how that distinguished officer had promised to do so, providing that he approved of this candidate for military honours.

"But Charlie, Major Braddock will see you—to use Mr. Slade's words, he won't recommend a recruit he hasn't himself inspected; but Mr. Slade says—and it's awfully kind of him—that if you could manage to dine with him at the Thermopolium one day next week, he will get his uncle to meet you."

"It is very good of him," replied Charlie; "and I will manage it if he will only let me know what day; but, remember, I must go back to Cambridge to-night. I have only leave for three days (he didn't think it necessary to mention that he had obtained leave of absence for three days, under pretext of consulting a London physician); "but I can always manage to run up and get back by the first train in the morning." And Charlie felt, though he did not venture to express it, that he would willingly risk being sent down, sooner than miss this chance of getting a nomination for a profession he had now set his heart on.

"Very well, then," said Lettie; "I shall write and tell him you will gratefully accept his invitation, if he will forward it to your Cambridge address."

"That's all right," rejoined Charlie, gleefully. "And now, Aunt, I must say good-bye. You are a trump,

Lettie;" and having given his sister a hearty kiss, and shaken hands with his aunt, Charlie shot down the stairs and made his way back to Duke Street.

Charlie's meditations were a little mixed as he walked Westward. He was in high spirits at the idea of the opening which presented itself to him; but the usual bitterness was mingled in the cup, to wit, that he would have to make some arrangements about those confounded bills. Still, his Aunt Connop had just distinctly said that she would come down with something handsome to see him a Dragoon. Perhaps she would see him out of this scrape. She had done so once or twice before in a small way, and Charlie felt rather afraid of confessing the extent of his misdoings this time to his sister, and she was the medium through which he generally approached his aunt. However, he thought, "Only let me once get into the army, and some of them, I think, are bound to see me through it."

As he passed through Piccadilly, Charlie took out his watch, and wondered whether he had time to turn into Curzon Street and call upon Mrs. Kynaston. He was beginning now to entertain a lively appreciation of that lady's charms. In the hunting-field she had a serious rival in the goddess Diana, for the prettiest woman in England would have had to ride hard and straight to keep Charlie in her company while hounds were running, but in London it was very different. There Mrs. Kynaston had no rival in Charlie's estimation, and, miss his train or not, he determined to call. "Yes, Mrs. Kynaston was at home," so the servant informed him, and he was duly ushered into that lady's pretty little drawing-room in Curzon Street.

She received him with much *empressement*, for he really was a favourite of hers, and was quite aware of his admiration for herself. She sometimes thought with a saucy air of triumph of their first meeting, and how utterly oblivious he had been to the fact that he was doing escort to a very pretty woman, and Kate Kynaston would softly murmur to herself, "Things would be very different now, I think."

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Devereux. Are you up in town for long? Heard you were dining with my husband

last night; but I suppose they don't give you a long furlough from Cambridge?"

"No," laughed Charlie; "very short, indeed, but I hope soon—yes, very soon—to have done with it. I have a chance of entering the army, and if that comes off I shall cut Cambridge at once. Don't you think I shall be right?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," replied Mrs. Kynaston. "You will make a very fair Dragoon, and I don't think you 'frame' for anything like bookwork."

"That's just what Lettie says!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Yes. The life will just suit you—and remember I speak as a woman having experience."

"I don't think I am clever," replied Devereux, laughing; "but you needn't tell a fellow so, Mrs. Kynaston. I think I can ride a bit and play a decent game of billiards. I had some tough battles with the Major the other night, and had decidedly the best of it."

"Perhaps he was not in form," replied Mrs. Kynaston, drily. "My husband takes a good deal of beating in a general way."

"And I flatter myself I do also," rejoined Charlie, a little piqued. "No, I honestly believe I am a few points better than the Major."

"Well, perhaps, *it* is so," replied Mrs. Kynaston, "only recollect that my husband has had far wider experience than you have had. He is apt to play carelessly except for money."

"We had a trifle on, just to make it interesting," replied Charlie.

"Well, perhaps you *are* the best," said Mrs. Kynaston, indifferently, "only I wouldn't be too sure. How is Pole Star?"

"Doing wonderfully well, I hear, and very much improved since we got so disgracefully beaten at Lincoln. I hope to avenge my defeat there in the autumn, and that you will be there to see it."

"I hope so too," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston. "But our movements at present are very uncertain. The Major never makes up his mind until the end of the season, and very often not until the end of October."

Major Kynaston's movements were in good truth governed considerably by his financial success on the Turf, as his wife had confided to Lettie, but Mrs. Kynaston was not likely to enter into such confidences with Charlie.

"And when do you expect to go up for your inspection? Lettie told me all about it, and I know that you are to be paraded before Major Braddock. I trust that the wine may be properly iced, and that the cook may have done his *devoirs* deftly," continued Mrs. Kynaston, laughing. "I suppose you know that a mistake in a side dish, or the claret served at an undue temperature, may nip your aspirations in the bud?"

"Yes," replied Charlie, joining in her laugh. "I have heard that Major Braddock regards dinner as a very solemn function; but we are to dine at his own club, and surely there should be safety in that. I should think the *chef* for his own sake would do his best for Major Braddock."

"There is much worldly wisdom in your speech," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston. "*Gourmets* like Major Braddock 'back their bills,' and make bitter the lives of both cook and committee should even their mutton chop not be done to the exact turn."

"Let us hope the Fates will be propitious. And now, Mrs. Kynaston, I must wish you good-bye, for I have but just time to pack up my traps and catch my train."

"Good-bye and may all success attend you. Write as soon as you know; or, better still, come and tell me you are to be a Dragoon."

Kate Kynaston sat plunged in reverie for some time after Charlie had taken his departure. She knew her husband too well to suppose that the light-hearted boy would have any chance with him at cards or billiards. What could Dick mean? He surely did not intend to plunder such small game as Charlie Devereux, and yet that the latter had any chance with her husband at billiards or cards she did not believe for one moment. Poor Kate! it was far from her nature to turn hawk, and she had winced at first when her eyes were opened to the fact that Dick Kynaston got his living for the most part by his skill

in all description of 'play. But she soon grew callous, and even stooped to make use of her own smiles and bright eyes to lure men into her husband's net. But she was loyal to her favourites, and Dick, though he ruled her with an iron hand, on the whole knew that now and again she would stand no plundering of the innocents. It was on behalf of the young ones Kate chiefly interfered. Her elder admirers, she deemed, ought to be able to take care of themselves, but she would interfere sharply sometimes on behalf of her boyish adorers, and she was just the sort of woman whom quite young men especially worship. I don't mean to say that Kate Kynaston had not plenty of men of all ages at her feet, but she had a quiet way with her that put "young ones" at their ease in the first half-hour. No, she would not have this thing. She would tell Dick that he must stay his hand as far as Charlie Devereux was concerned. She knew that he was wild, and she knew that he was weak, but she would not have it on her conscience that she stood by and saw this boy ruined on the threshold of his career. She was submissive in general, and Dick Kynaston was not the man to bear the thwarting of his schemes patiently, but this matter should be speedily settled between them, and she would let him know that Charlie Devereux must be spared.

Then her thoughts ran back to the old channel. She did not deceive herself in the least. She knew that her liking for Gilbert Slade was growing on her. She knew it from the dismay with which she had learnt that he had interfered in Charlie Devereux's behalf at Lettie's request. Gilbert, she argued, must be much struck with that young lady to take all this trouble on her brother's account. She had taken a great fancy to Lettie, but unfortunately she had taken an equally strong one for Slade, and when two such friendships clash it is pretty safe to predict that the woman will be thrown over in favour of the man.

Again, Mrs. Kynaston had chosen, in virtue of her prior acquaintance, to regard Gilbert Slade as her own peculiar property. How very slight that acquaintance had been was shown by the fact that when he met her on old Tom Devereux's drag at Lincoln he had failed to remember her.

True, Gilbert had devoted himself to her upon that occasion more than to Lettie, but a man would have laughed at Mrs. Kynaston's entertaining such an idea that she held right of vassalage over Gilbert, though a woman would perfectly have understood it, and have divined in a moment that the friendship of those two would be of short duration now that Mrs. Kynaston's jealousy was aroused. That lady, rousing herself at length from her reverie, sprang to her feet, and as she paced up and down the drawing-room, was quite as determined that Lettie Devereux should never wed Gilbert Slade, as that her husband should not plunder the brother.

XIV.—CHARLIE ON PROBATION.

GILBERT SLADE contrived to see a good deal of Miss Devereux during this last fortnight. As the diplomatist who had the arranging a meeting between Charlie and Major Braddock on the most favourable terms, he found it necessary to consult Lettie very often. The Major usually, and more especially at this time of year, had pretty numerous engagements in the dinner way. Therefore it was necessary to ascertain, first, what evening would suit him. Then it was imperative that Charlie should be written to, and told that if anything should prevent his attending on that occasion he must telegraph at once, as otherwise he would create a most unfavourable impression on the Major, who regarded engagements of this sort as bonds of the most sacred description. Charlie also had to be cautioned against the heinous sin of unpunctuality. Very fond was the Major of laying down the axiom, that to be late on such an occasion was an offence unpardonable. When in the army he had been always given to harrying the subalterns about being behind time for the men's duty. Unpunctuality on other parades he might look over, but not on this one; so that altogether Gilbert was a good deal in Onslow Gardens. However, at last everything was arranged. Charlie had been most carefully tutored,

as far as Lettie, inspired by Slade, could do so by the post. He had even been tutored into studying "Lucille," and warned, if he saw a fair opportunity, to fire off the following quotation from that poem:—

We may live without friends, we may live without books;
But civilised men cannot live without cooks.

"I am so very anxious," said Lettie, when the important day was finally fixed. "I do so hope Charlie will acquit himself creditably. I have done as you told me. I have warned him to be highly-appreciative of the good things set before him; but to be a little diffident as to giving an opinion about the wine."

"Quite right," said Gilbert, laughing. "Very young men are apt to set up as judges in that respect, and I know that always moves Uncle Bob's wrath. I even once heard him assert that no man knew anything about wine until he had had a fit of the gout."

"But," cried Lettie, "men don't always have the gout, do they?"

"I fancy my uncle and his cronies are unanimous concerning that complaint. We must only hope that he is not disposed to just now."

"It is very good of you, Mr. Slade, to take all this trouble for me, and I am very grateful to you; but I feel wofully nervous about Charlie's ordeal. Your uncle seems somewhat peculiar."

"Not at all, Miss Devereux; not more so than the generality of mankind. The only thing is that, as I want Charlie to show to the best advantage, I'm giving you a chart of the country. We have most of us peculiarities, and it is just our clashing of these that makes people take a dislike to us when we first meet them."

"It is very good of you, and I can't be sufficiently grateful."

"Don't think of it," interrupted Gilbert; "I'm only too pleased that I managed to arrange the matter before my time was up. I must leave London the day after to-morrow; but I was so afraid that it might not come off."

"But I shall see you again before you go?" said Lettie,

“ Oh, yes, I'll come down to-morrow afternoon, if you'll allow me, and tell you how things went off. And now I must say adieu. Depend on it, it will be all right, Miss Devereux. Uncle Bob is a good-natured fellow, though perhaps over-fond of his dinner, and has always done anything I wanted ; ” and with these words of encouragement Gilbert Slade took his departure.

Lettie really was very anxious that Charlie should get into the army. She thought, unless he had some occupation, that volatile brother of hers would most assuredly come to grief. She had been greatly pleased with the enthusiasm he showed at the prospect of entering the army, and it was therefore no wonder that she should be anxious about his success.

“ It's odd,” thought Lettie, “ but really at present his chance seems to depend on the caprice of a middle-aged gentleman.” Then she thought how very kind Mr. Slade had been about the whole business ; and then I think her whole reverie rather concentrated itself on Mr. Slade himself. It is a very easy transition, when the subject is a good-looking young man, to glide from “ how very kind ” to “ how very nice ” he was, and from that to those day-dreams in which all young ladies are prone to indulge, and to what answer she should give if ever he should ask the momentous question, and from that the whole thing dies away in a background of orange flowers, bridesmaids, rice, and old slippers.

The fateful evening at last arrived. Charlie Devereux, having compared his watch with the Horseguards in the afternoon—the one authority on time that Major Braddock recognised, to which all other clocks were expected to bend—arrived at the Thermopolium at least ten minutes before the appointed hour. Gilbert shook him heartily by the hand, and said, laughing,

“ This will do. Uncle Robert is not here himself yet. Don't forget the hints I have sent you ; I know you'll excuse my doing so, but of course we have a point to carry : appreciative but not demonstrative about the dinner, and somewhat diffident on the subject of wine ; bear in mind it's all the Major's ordering ; and everything is sure to be

good, or else I prophesy a very stormy morrow down below for the cook and butler."

"I shall do my very best," rejoined Charlie, "to profit by your hints. As I am terribly in earnest about this thing, I hope I shall pass muster. Anyway I can't sufficiently thank you, Slade, for the trouble you have taken about it!"

"Nonsense," replied the other, "but hush, here comes the great pasha himself."

"To the minute, Uncle Robert. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Devereux."

The Major shook hands cordially with Charlie, but at the same time Gilbert noticed an extremely puzzled expression on his countenance. As they went upstairs to the coffee-room, Major Braddock took advantage of an opportunity to whisper to his nephew.

"Deuced odd, Bertie, but I'll swear I have seen your friend before."

"Not likely, I think," rejoined Slade. "Some likeness probably misleads you."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the Major testily. His valet had forgotten his buttonhole, and had to be despatched in a hansom cab in hot haste in search of this indispensable adjunct at nearly the last moment. Notwithstanding, Major Braddock sat down to his dinner. The clear turtle was undeniable, and by the time the glass of Madeira, its natural sequence, had been swallowed, the Major dismissed the subject, and had given himself up to enjoyment. The dinner proved a success on every point. The champagne was iced to a turn, the claret was warmed to a nicety, and Charlie, with the aid of the few hints he had received, had no difficulty in passing as what he really was, a genuine unaffected gentlemanly young fellow. It was evident that he had found favour in the Major's sight, and when the quotation was dexterously fired off over a wondrous cunning *salmi* that appeared as the dinner wore on, the Major exclaimed:

"My dear young friend, allow me to congratulate you. You have the making of an epicure, and a considerable rudimentary knowledge of the highest art of civilisation. I have little doubt that in course of time you'll be as good

a judge of a dinner as I am!" And the Major uttered these words in the same manner that another man might have suggested a Victoria Cross or a K.C.B.-ship as goals in a military career. "It is to be regretted," continued the Major, glancing sadly down at his own portly proportions, "that the acquirement of such knowledge does spoil the figure, but as Mr. Weller remarked, and he must (in his rough way) have been as one of us, 'Width and wisdom go together.'"

After a couple of cigars Charlie, in obedience to a hint from his mentor, took his departure.

"He'll do, Bertie; he'll do! As nice a young one as I have seen for some time. I shall have great pleasure in doing all I can for him. I cannot think who his face reminds me of—God bless my soul! I have it now!—being here, recalls it to my memory. That is the young fellow I saw about a fortnight ago playing billiards in the next room with that old robber, Dick Kynaston. And I'll tell you what, Bertie, my boy; if Devereux has got any money, the sooner you give him the hint the better. I know what Dick Kynaston can do on a billiard-table. And during the little time that I looked on he was playing with young Devereux as a cat plays with a mouse."

"I shouldn't think that Charlie Devereux was worth Kynaston's attention in that way. Of course he knows them. They were up hunting in his country all last season. But I'm very glad you like young Devereux, and hope now that you'll give him a lift."

"I will, I will! But don't say too much about it, Bertie; for I don't want to disappoint him. And—it may not come off."

"Quite good enough, Uncle Robert, to know that you'll do your best. But I'll be careful not to arouse undue expectations."

The next afternoon Gilbert wended his way to Onslow Gardens to tell Lettie what had been accomplished.

"Most satisfactory, I assure you, Miss Devereux. Major Braddock was perfectly satisfied with your brother, and pronounced him a very nice youngster. Even the quotation was fired off with great dexterity. I have done every-

thing possible, and though of course we can't be quite certain, yet I have little doubt my uncle will obtain him a nomination. The examination, of course, is Charlie's affair, but I don't suppose that will bother him much."

"Whether it bothers him or not, he must pass it," rejoined Miss Devereux, laughing; "even if I have to turn schoolmistress, and hear him his lessons daily. However, I have no fear about that. Charlie will work hard enough, if it is wanted, with an object in view. And now, do you really leave London to-morrow?"

"Yes. Leave is up, and I must return to York. It is not a bad quarter, but no place seems a good one when you want to be somewhere else. By the way, you are very intimate with the Kynastons, are you not?"

"Yes," rejoined Lettie. "That is, with Mrs. Kynaston. I like her very much. She is as bright as she is pretty, and can be so excessively amusing."

"But," said Gilbert, "I gather you don't care much for Major Kynaston?"

"No," said Lettie, "I'm sure I don't know why not, for he has always been very civil and polite to me. I have no doubt I am quite wrong, but he always gives me the idea of being so insincere."

"I fancy he rather bears that character," said Slade; "but what has become of Mrs. Connop?"

"She is to come back for me, and take me out driving, and is very nearly due now," and Lettie glanced at the clock. "I was so anxious to hear of Charlie's prospects, that I waited to see him. As for thanking you for the good news you brought, I cannot sufficiently; but you do understand, Mr. Slade, how very grateful I am, don't you?"

Lettie had risen from her chair, and very handsome the girl looked in the excitement of the moment, and very handsome the girl looked with her cheeks slightly flushed, and her gray eyes sparkling with pleasure. This getting her brother into the army was an object very near to her heart. She was of a warm-hearted, impulsive disposition, and very fond of Charlie, and was extremely gratified at the prospect of Charlie's becoming a Dragoon. Gilbert was by no means blind to her attractions, and thought

Miss Devereux had never looked so handsome as she did at this moment.

"You're making much of a very small service," he said, "and I'm quite ashamed at the wealth of gratitude by which it is repaid. Don't you know we all go upon the recruiting service sometimes? I can only trust in the future that you'll have no cause to shake your head, and pointing at me, say: 'There's the Sergeant Kite that trapped my brother.'"

"I have no fear of the result," rejoined Lettie. "But happen what may, I will promise never to blame you for it; here is my hand on it."

Slade took the small palm which Lettie extended, and not only pressed it warmly, but detained it a trifle longer than there was any necessity for. The girl coloured slightly as he at last released it, and then exclaimed:

"I hear the carriage, and must run and get my bonnet on. You stay and tell my aunt all about it. I shall be down again in ten minutes."

Mrs. Connop was as much delighted as Lettie with the news, and full of anxiety to know when Charlie might expect his nomination. When did Gilbert think that Charlie would be gazetted; what regiment was he likely to be appointed to? and various questions of a like nature, which Mr. Slade had to plead his utter inability to answer. Then, in the expansiveness of her nature, she begged him to come and dine, and spend his last evening with them; but Lettie fortunately returned just in time to remind her that they themselves were engaged that evening. And Lettie felt rather put out that it should happen to be so. However, there was no help for it. So Gilbert made his adieux, supplemented with a promise to be at Lincoln to witness Pole Star's triumph in the autumn.

"I shall be a very happy woman, my dear," said Mrs. Connop, as the carriage rolled away Park-wards, "if I see Charlie a Dragoon, and you engaged to be married before the year's out."

"Nonsense, aunt," replied Lettie. "How can you be so foolish?"

"Mr. Slade is a very good-looking man, and although I

don't suppose he's at all made up his mind yet, I doubt whether he'd call the idea 'nonsense' exactly. At all events Charlie's commission is an event more than probable, you must admit."

"Much more probable than the other, Auntie, dear," rejoined Lettie, as she turned her face away.

"We shall see," said Mrs. Connop, tersely.

XV.—ENTERED FOR THE ARMY.

"I DON'T exactly see your object, Dick; but, as you know, I'm not in the habit of bothering you about reasons. It is usually sufficient for me to know what you want without troubling my head about why you want it, I have been civil to this Mr. Furzedon, as you requested; and, if you think it worth while, could make a small dinner for him. What he wants is obvious: the man is mad to push his way into London society; we are one of his stepping stones. Of course I can help him, though I don't think much of him; but it is for you to decide whether it is worth our while."

"Never mind the dinner, Kate, and never mind the 'why.' I have a strong idea that Furzedon may be very useful to me before long. I have made a mistake about him to start with, and thought that because he was young he was innocent. That young man was born the wrong side of forty, and one would have to get up early to teach him anything he don't know. Why, if I didn't detect him foxing at billiards with me! It isn't that I couldn't beat his head off; but the cheek of his thinking that he could impose on a man of my experience," and the Major looked as Tennyson might do at receiving a hint from a provincial poetaster.

"I had nothing to do with that," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston quietly; "only remember, if I am civil to him and forward his views, it is because you desire it. And now, Dick, one word in earnest. I don't say you mean the boy any harm;

but I do know you have imbued Charlie Devereux with the idea that he can beat you at billiards, and probably many other games."

"What the deuce is it to you if he should think so? I can scarcely suppose, my lady," he continued with a sneer, "that you have interested yourself in a boy like that!"

"You happen to be wrong, Dick," she said quietly. "I have, though not in the way you would insinuate; but mind, I'll not see that boy plundered. And while paying this compliment to your skill, I will also point out that it is surely not worth your while."

"That is a thing, Kate, you will perhaps allow me to judge for myself. You will be good enough to bear in mind that I stand no interference with my plans."

"It is very rarely that I run counter to your wishes," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston; "but you know from past experience that when I am firmly resolved on a thing I can be every bit as obstinate as you. Charlie Devereux shall come to no harm at your hands if I can prevent it. As for Mr. Furzedon, I'll not raise a finger in his behalf."

"You fool!" rejoined the Major. "Only that you are creating a storm in a teacup, I would soon show you that you have to obey orders; but I am not likely to harm Charlie Devereux, for the best of all possible reasons—the game would not pay for the candle. There is never any harm in ascertaining any man's form at any game he fancies himself at, and that young undergraduate thinks he can play billiards."

"Now we understand each other," said Mrs. Kynaston, "we will leave him, if you please, in that delusion. At all events, he shall not be rudely awakened at my hands."

"A good deal of talk about nothing, as usual," sneered the Major. "I shan't be at home either to lunch or dinner, so make your own arrangements," and, so saying, the Major put on his hat, and having looked in the glass, and given a last twirl to his moustache, took his departure.

Hawks speedily recognise hawks; in short, beasts of prey rarely fail to detect one another. The carnivora of humanity are swiftly aware of each other's presence. Just as amongst those outside the pale of the law there are cabal-

istic signs and a shibboleth not understood by ordinary people, so amongst the higher vultures of society there is a recognition that takes but a short time to arrive at. The adventurer who has lived over half Europe very rapidly takes stock of his brothers, and Kynaston had already discovered that Ralph Furzedon was a very promising professor of his own line of business.

"Just the partner I want," thought the Major. "Has some capital, but wants introductions and opportunities. We might do great things together. He would be an apt pupil with my experience to guide him."

Apt pupils, when you are engaged in such ticklish pursuits as the Major's, are likely to prove inconvenient in the long run. There is an old adage that runs

To teach his grandson draughts, then his leisure he'd employ,
Until at last the old man was beaten by the boy.

It is rather a nuisance when our *protégé* gets the best of us at our own game, and in the sort of games played by the social bandits of the Kynaston type there is not uncommonly disagreement about the division of the spoil. Furzedon, though young in years, was, as the Major rightly conceived, old in the iniquities of play of all kinds, and Dick Kynaston is destined to have many uncomfortable hours in consequence of the projected partnership.

"Honour among thieves" is just as fallacious a saying as that "Force is no remedy," or that "Coercion is the dragooning of a country." All civilised countries live under coercion, which simply means that the inhabitants have to observe the laws of the land they live in; and force is usually the remedy employed to those who infringe them. As for coercion, I suppose no city in the universe is under the extreme coercion of London, where your lying down is almost provided for as in the days when the Norman ordained that the curfew should toll, whilst the Sabbath you, if a man without a home or a club, are bound to observe in weariness and fasting. There is very little honour observed of thieves, whatever their rank in life, when their interests clash. What had first opened Kynaston's eyes to the precociousness of his young friend had been Furzedon's

accurate information with regard to Turf matters. The old usurer, of whom, as a parent, that gentleman was so heartily ashamed, had Jewish blood in his veins, and an intimate acquaintance with the tribes generally, and especially with those in his own way of business. Now the Jews have been invariably mixed up in all sport at which money is to be made—from the prize-ring to the racecourse. I can't call to mind a Hebrew cricketer, but to the Turf and the Ring the Israelites have largely contributed, and the former sendeth the Gentile constantly to Shadrac for the means with which to appease Gideon. Therefore racing secrets are rife amongst these people, and Furzedon was constantly permitted to share their knowledge; and the information he had thus been occasionally able to proffer the Major had given that gentleman a high opinion of his capacity.

Who lists the wind where it blows?

Who can tell what mischief a woman's vanity and caprice may occasion when wounded and disappointed? But let that woman's love be not a caprice, but a serious passion, and it's odds, like other fires, it leaves ruin behind it ere it burns itself out. Mrs. Kynaston, still brooding over her fancy for Gilbert Slade, is a woman in whom the fire is already smouldering, with vanity already mortified, and, in spite of an outwardly easy-going manner, of a temper that will reck little of consequences should the flames break out.

As for that Hussar speeding northwards, he little dreams of his conquest, or of the coil he has left behind him. He is by no means blind to feminine beauty, and quite recognises that Mrs. Kynaston is fair to look upon, and it was quite possible that had not a fairer in his eyes than she dawned simultaneously on the horizon, he might have become her devoted cavalier for a time; but as it is he thinks only of Lettie, and has well-nigh forgotten Mrs. Kynaston's existence, a circumstance which that lady has far too good an opinion of her own attractions to ever dream of. That Gilbert Slade was wavering in his allegiance, she did think. She was accustomed to that, but

with this difference, that the wavering was usually in her favour, and at some other woman's expense.

Gilbert Slade found the stream of life in the Northern capital run somewhat sluggish after London. A quaint old city waxes somewhat drowsy in the dog days, only to wake up again when August brings racing on the Knaves-mire, and the Leger and the hunting season are near at hand. However, Gilbert made the best of things, and was getting through what is rather the dead season in the country—to men—very fairly, wondering occasionally what Miss Devereux was doing, and whether she was still in town, when one morning the post brought him a letter from his Uncle Robert, which necessitated his at once communicating with that young lady. It was dated from the “Thermopolium,” and ran as follows:—

“DEAR BOB,—

“I have succeeded in getting a nomination for your *protégé*, and if he prospers he won't be the first soldier who has owed success in his profession to the attractions of his female relations. His Royal Highness was exceedingly nice about it, and said, ‘I can oblige you, Major Braddock, in what you want, and I shall have much pleasure in doing so. There is a cornetcy going in your old regiment, and I'm sure I can't do better for him than that. I inspected them not long ago, and found them, as usual, all that they ought to be. Leave his name and address in the outer room, and I'll see Mr. Devereux gets his nomination at once. There will be an examination in October, and he will be gazetted as soon as he has got through that,’ and then His Royal Highness remarked, laughing, ‘I was glad to find that the champagne of the —th Hussars was as good as ever; Colonel Higginson told me that you still looked after them in that respect, and are a sort of honorary mess president even yet.’ I thanked His Highness, and told him I still tried to do my duty to my country. And so I do, you dog! Am I not always recommending her defenders to drink the best brands only? Nothing injures the constitution more than drinking bad wine. Now, Master Bertie, I have succeeded in getting

young Devereux entered, bear in mind I shan't like it if he's beat. Tell him he *must* pass. I don't want His Royal Highness to blow me up for having interfered in behalf of a confounded fool. You had better write to him at once, and tell him to look up his books again. Thank goodness, in my time they didn't think it necessary we should know so much before we began. They caught us young, and left it to the regiment to break us.

“Your affectionate uncle,

“ROBERT BRADDOCK.”

Gilbert Slade was excessively pleased at the result of the Major's interference. He felt that he really had been of prompt service to Miss Devereux in this business. And then he thought that it would be rather a credit to himself to have introduced a recruit who could ride like Charlie into the regiment, for Gilbert had too much of the racing instincts of his family not to recognise that Charlie only wanted practice to become a really good gentleman rider, and even in a cavalry regiment men really good between the flags are rare. There was one thing—it was of course imperative upon him now to write to Miss Devereux, and somehow he thought it would be rather pleasant to open a correspondence with Lettie. That missive duly arrived in Onslow Gardens, and threw the recipient and Mrs. Connop into a state of the wildest delight, tempered with no little anxiety on the subject of this examination. She had heard Charlie speak of men being plucked for their “little go,” which she knew meant failure to pass an examination of some sort, and her confidence in her brother's riding was considerably greater than that she reposed in his reading. As for Mrs. Connop, she felt quite confident of her favourite nephew's ability to do anything in that way. Had he not gone through a course of University training? and was it likely that an examination for the army could have any terrors for a man who had undergone such a training? But she, too, had her misgivings; it is often the case, we attain what we ardently desire, and are immediately afflicted with doubts as to whether, after all, we were not, perhaps, better without it. Charlie, she

knew, although she knew it very partially, had developed a faculty for getting into money troubles at the University, and her experience told her that equal facility and greater temptation existed for indulging this infirmity in the army. And it did occur to Mrs. Connop, even in this hour of triumph, that his outfit might not be the only demand that would be made upon her purse strings.

But Lettie hastened to reply to Gilbert Slade's letter, and thank him for the trouble he had taken in her brother's behalf. "Indeed, Mr. Slade," she said, "it has been very good of you to take all this trouble in Charlie's behalf. And I have no doubt that it was mainly thanks to the cunning hints he received from you which enabled him to make himself acceptable to Major Braddock, to whom also we feel very indebted about the whole business. The idea of his being in the same regiment with yourself is delightful, because I am sure that you will put him in the way of things; and, though I have no fear of his soon making his way, yet the life will be strange to him at first, as he has had no experience of the ways of military men. As for passing, he writes very confidently, and vows 'that he shall pull through, though it may be with a fall or two;' and as I know he is very much in earnest about obtaining his commission, I believe him. Once more, Mr. Slade, I must say that I don't know how to tell you how grateful we feel to you. You must come down and see Pole Star win at Lincoln; and then, perhaps, we may induce you to come on to North Leach, and have a few days' hunting in the Wolds. With kind regards to Auntie,

"Yours most sincerely,

"LETTIE DEVEREUX."

Gilbert conceived this letter required acknowledgment, and wrote a courteous reply, in which he expressed his hope of assisting at Pole Star's expected triumph in the autumn; and further requesting that he might be informed as speedily as possible of the result of the fray between Charlie and his torturers; but Miss Devereux made no further sign, and it was not till the end of September that he received a letter from Charlie himself:—

"DEAR SLADE," he began, "I have gone through my ordeal, and, although not formally apprised of it, feel sure that I have passed. They have put me on in about the easiest chapter of all Cæsar's Commentaries, the one about which, if you know anything about Latin at all, you couldn't go wrong in. Then they asked me if I would take up French, and, being excessively shy concerning my knowledge of that language, I said, 'No, thank you.' I was only compelled to take up one, you know, and felt sure I'd pull through in Latin. The whole examination, as it stands at present, is a farce, and one which no ordinary schoolboy could possibly be spun over, with one exception, Old Bridge Hall, who examines in history, has collected a bundle of very dry facts, thickly studded with dates, which he has published. He examines you chiefly out of his own book, and dates are his hobby. Of this I luckily got a hint, so just struggled hard at his chronological table for six weeks; deuced lucky I did so, for the bigger half of my questions were of that nature. I answered them like the well-crammed gosling I was, and have very little doubt that I shall have totally forgotten all about them ere six months are over my head. Never mind! they have served my turn, and I shall hope to be with you at York this winter, and have a good time with the York and Ainsty. Good-bye, and no end of thanks for all you have ever done for me.

"Ever yours,

"CHARLIE DEVEREUX."

Army examinations, it must be borne in mind, were quite in their infancy when Mr. Devereux passed so triumphantly through the ordeal. They have become competitive since, and assumed a very different complexion; education, indeed, seems highly necessary for anything except as a qualification for the electorate.

XVI.—DEAREST FRIENDS "MAY" DIFFER.

IT was not till the very last week of her London visit that Lettie received Slade's letter containing the news of Charlie's nomination, and it was only when she wrote to Kate Kynaston, proposing to call and say "good-bye," that lady learnt the fact that in the event of success young Devereux was to be gazetted to Gilbert's regiment. If she had not been satisfied with Mr. Slade's interference in the matter before, her anger about it now was tolerably pronounced. She was not going to be out-manœuvred by a chit of a country girl like that if she knew it; and she persistently regarded Gilbert as having fallen captive, metaphorically speaking, to her own spear. She was not likely to submit to having the spoils of the chase wrested from her in this fashion. Charlie in the same regiment, and naturally, at his sister's bidding, perpetually bringing Mr. Slade with him to North Leach! Had Mrs. Kynaston been on the Board of Examiners I would not have given much for Mr. Devereux's chance of passing, nor had she been colonel of the regiment do I think much leave would have been accorded to him just at present. On one point that lady was more resolute than ever—that though he might escape from her thrall, Gilbert should never be husband to Lettice Devereux.

But outwardly her brow was as smooth as of yore, and her congratulations to Lettie on paper apparently warm and sincere. Women, when the quarrel is *à l'outrance*, know better than to betray themselves; they bide their time, but when that comes don't think they will spare their hand, or fail to send the steel home to its bitterest length. She turned over in her mind how this union might be prevented; there was plenty of time—it was a thing that might never come about, and even should she learn that the pair were engaged, it was very possible, thought Mrs. Kynaston, to arrange a slip 'twixt that cup and lip. Marriages may be made in heaven, perhaps, but that they are frequently ruptured on earth, both in the egg and when full-grown, we have much demonstration of, and how often

woman's jealousy or man's frailty contributes to such sad ending what philosopher shall determine? But I fancy the former has shattered as much matrimonial happiness as can be attributed to any enemy of Hymen.

Suddenly it flashed vaguely before Mrs. Kynaston's mind that this new *protégé* of her husband—Mr. Furzedon—might be a useful card in her hand in the game she contemplated playing. She had read that gentleman's character pretty correctly, considering the little she had seen of him. She knew that he was selfish, had a strong suspicion that he was niggardly, but she further knew for certain that his great ambition was to attain some social status in the great London world. He admired Miss Devereux—that was a fact patent to any one gifted with the power of perception—but Mr. Furzedon was not a man likely to marry, except deliberately, and in furtherance of the line he had chalked out for himself.

"It would not be such a hard thing," mused Mrs. Kynaston, "to make Furzedon anxious to marry Lettie Devereux. Her brother getting into a crack Dragoon regiment is one step towards it! Let Mr. Furzedon only be persuaded that Miss Devereux is an acknowledged beauty, whose face is a passport to fashion's portals, and he will be keen enough to woo her. He would prefer a wife with money, perhaps—with a handle to her name, undoubtedly—but he is far too shrewd a judge not to know that a man with no antecedents and only a moderate command of money cannot expect the pick of the matrimonial market. Yes," continued Mrs. Kynaston, still following up the same train of thought, "it is quite possible that Mr. Furzedon may be a very useful card to me in future. I don't like the man myself, nor do I suppose Dick does either, for, to do him justice, although necessity compels him to know very electro-plated gentlemen at times, poor old Dick thoroughly understands good form when he meets it. I usually obey my lord and master, and for once his wishes and mine conform. He has his reasons for wishing me to be civil to Mr. Furzedon; I also have mine. That slightly underbred young man promises to be rather a tame cat about our establishment;" and then Mrs. Kynaston,

glancing at the clock, muttered softly to herself " Lettie, my dear, it is time you made your appearance. How pleased I shall be to see you ! How sad I shall be that we are about to part ! And how sad, my love, I am at the thought that I cannot bite you ! "

She had not to wait long. A few minutes more and Miss Devereux was announced, and Mrs. Kynaston rose and received her with the greatest effusion.

" I'm rather late, I know," said Lettie, as she sank into an easy chair, " but there is always so much to do the last few days ; people whom one has almost forgot have to be called on, and people whom you had hoped had forgot all about you suddenly turn up, and pay visits of unwarrantable length and never-to-be-forgotten dreariness. I don't know how it is, but these latter people always circumvent the servants ; your dearest friends may be turned away from the door, but, whatever the instructions, these people invariably at least gain the drawing-room, and you are very lucky if they don't catch you in it."

" Yes," replied Mrs. Kynaston, gaily, " few people possess such a treasure as Staples. He was with the Major before I married. He is a little brusque in his manner, I grant, but he has almost an unerring instinct of whom to let in and whom to keep out. He has a capital memory, and the slightest hint suffices him. Dick always says, in joke, that there are times when Staples will say ' Not at home ' to *him*, and that nothing but his latchkey makes admission to his own house a certainty. Undoubtedly Staples is a very superior watchdog. As for the importunate creditor—don't look shocked, Lettie, half the West End of London are troubled in this wise—Staples recognises them, I verily believe, by their knock, let them play such salvo as they will upon our door ; while the vagueness of his knowledge as to whether Major Kynaston is in town, or ever will be in town again, is simply unsurpassable."

" An invaluable man, Staples," rejoined Lettie. " I must consider myself fortunate to be in his good graces."

" Oh, yes ; he knows you, and that you are one of the privileged, but I haven't congratulated you. I am so pleased about Charlie, and how very nice it is that he

should have got into Mr. Slade's regiment. It will be especially nice for you, my dear!" continued Mrs. Kynaston, archly.

"Why so?" asked Lettie.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Kynaston, carelessly, "Still, it's always convenient to have one's brothers and admirers in the same bundle. When you want a few young men for a ball you will always be able to write to Charlie to come, and bring two or three brother officers with him. And if you haven't, after the first twelve months, taught him *whom* to bring, then you deserve to die an old maid."

"How can you say such things?" cried Lettie, hotly. "My brothers have always been accustomed to bring such friends as they like to North Leach, and it is not likely that Charlie, when he becomes a Dragoon, that he will renounce that privilege—why should he? And why should not one of those friends be Mr. Slade? He, at all events, has a strong claim on our hospitality, if only for the service he has just rendered us."

"Quite so, my dear," assented the other speaker. "Men have done more than that for the love of *ces beaux yeux*, and received far less guerdon than, I prophesy, will be Mr. Slade's lot. Now, don't get angry, Lettice, but, bear in mind, these soldiers are arrant flirts—they woo, and they ride away. Don't let your heart out of your keeping till the engagement ring is on your finger."

"What nonsense you are talking," rejoined Lettie, petulantly. "Mr. Slade has undeniably been very kind in this business to Charlie. I presume I may feel grateful to him without having the slightest ulterior thought?"

"Of course you may," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, with a sarcastic little smile; "but you wouldn't be a woman if you hadn't one. What do you suppose made Mr. Slade take such interest in a young gentleman he had never even seen? Pooh! Lettie, don't juggle with facts; nor attempt to hoodwink a woman of the world like me. If it was not from admiration of yourself, I would simply know why did he trouble his head about Charlie?"

Lettie flushed, and felt very uncomfortable under the merciless raillery of her hostess. She most devoutly wished

herself well out of Chester Street, and that she had never come to bid Mrs. Kynaston good-bye. She was quite conscious that there was a good deal of truth in what her hostess had said. She was not yet quite in love with Gilbert Slade; but she did not disguise from herself that she was in a very fair way to become so. And all these semi-jeering remarks of Mrs. Kynaston's stung like so many pin-pricks; but, sharp as the stab may be, no Indian brave ever stands torture with more assumed indifference than a woman in society endures the jibes of her sisters.

"I can hardly answer that question," Miss Devereux replied at length. "My experience, of course, does not go so far as yours by some years, but I have known people do kindly actions without seeking much gain for themselves. You know best; but don't you think it would be rather a dreary world if we never did our neighbour a good turn without calculation? Surely, Kate, you don't look to be paid in kind for every small assistance you may render your fellow-creatures in this world?"

"I usually am," replied that lady, with asperity. "'As we sow, so shall we reap,' so say the Scriptures—a truth that knowledge of the world tells me may be read in very different lights. The kindnesses you have sown generally produce but a crop of ingratitude. Be a good friend to a man, and he drops you for the first face that catches his fancy; be a good friend to a woman, and she devotes every art she possesses to steal from you your lover or your husband. Don't look so 'mazed,' Lettie! You were kind enough to remind me of my many years' additional experience, and *that* is the outcome of them."

If Miss Devereux was young, she was no fool: she was vaguely conscious that some jealousy concerning Gilbert Slade was at the bottom of Mrs. Kynaston's bitterness; but she had never grasped, nor was it likely she ever would, that that lady had considered the Hussar her own peculiar property, and, as has been said before, this was a conclusion on Mrs. Kynaston's part that circumstances by no means warranted.

There is no helping these things, men go on telling stories till they arrive at the belief that they were *bona fide*

the heroes of them. Men regard property that may come to them very often as property that must come to them, and eventually as property that actually belongs to them. When the holder dies, and his will announces that the late proprietor has taken a different view of things, such men are simply crushed with a sense of injustice, and that they have been the victims of heartless robbery

"I don't know what makes you speak so bitterly to-day, but I suppose you are in low spirits, something has gone wrong perhaps, and then, we all know, life looks none so rosy. I can't plead guilty to knowing much about that sort of thing; but even a school-girl has occasional fits of depression: her music gets the best of her, or she's baulked in some expected pleasure. I thought you would be so glad to hear of Charlie's good fortune."

"So I am, of course; haven't I told you so? And how nice you will find it having him in a crack Hussar regiment.

Miss Devereux did not reply immediately—there is more than one way of offering congratulations, and Lettie was quite conscious that there was a flavour of hyssop about those of Mrs. Kynaston. "Well, good-bye," she said, rising; "I do hope you will think better of it, and take 'The Firs' again for next season. We shall miss you and the Major sadly as neighbours; and remember that the advantages which you have just said will accrue to me from Charlie's commission will also tend to make our few balls still more lively for you; in short," concluded Lettie, with a laugh, "if we can muster a few young men at North Leach, it is good for the whole neighbourhood in that way."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Kynaston as she shook hands with her again. "I don't know at all as yet if 'The Firs' is destined to be our winter quarters this year. One piece of advice, my dear, at parting: don't be too philanthropic, nor too ready to part with the partners your brother has delivered into your hand. You are very pretty, Lettie; but men are very fanciful, and let the bell-wether take up with a Gorgon, and the rest of them are struggling madly to secure her hand for the next dance."

Miss Devereux made no response. She was, indeed, only too glad to bring her visit to a termination. She

was quite conscious that their conversation, though nominally friendly, had been "on the jar" throughout, and that Mrs. Kynaston's congratulations had been very far from cordial; she did not understand it. She had thought that lady really fond of them all, and that she would have been delighted at hearing of Charlie's good fortune. But she felt quite sure that there was something in his appointment to the —th Hussars that did not meet Mrs. Kynaston's approval. Then as Miss Devereux drove back to Onslow Gardens her thoughts reverted to Mrs. Kynaston's innuendo that when Charlie had joined his regiment there would be much facility for asking Mr. Slade to come down with him to North Leach. She wondered if Mr. Slade would care to pay such a visit. She wondered a little as to whether he cared for her. She had good evidence that he had not forgotten her, or he would hardly have taken all this trouble in Charlie's behalf. "Ah," thought Lettie, "how jolly it would be if Pole Star should win at Lincoln, and they all come back to North Leach to have two or three days' hunting, and celebrate his triumph." And in *they* I fancy Mr. Gilbert Slade was emphatically included.

XVII.—BELLATON WOLD.

THE wind whistled shrill across the Yorkshire Wolds this March evening, but at that time of night there were few wayfarers about to suffer from that bleakness. Here and there a belated shepherd might have been seen hurrying to some hamlet nestling at the foot of the hills, or some stalwart farmer making a short cut to the snug house that called him master. A little distance below a species of plateau, well known as a famous training-ground, stood a many-gabled, well-thatched farmhouse. It was about the ordinary-sized dwelling that a well-to-do yeoman, who cultivated his own land, might be supposed to inhabit. By no means a large house or a house of any pretence, remarkable only for one thing, the rather extensive range

of stabling that stood around it. There was accommodation for many more horses than the tiller of such a farm as might be supposed attached to the dwelling would require. A bright light penetrated through the chinks of the shutters of a latticed window on the ground-floor and suggested the idea of warmth and a comfortable fireside within. Using our privileges of Asmodeus, we peep inside the parlour and see two men seated on either side of the glowing hearth, with a table well supplied with spirits and water. Alas! too well supplied for one of them.

"Yes, Mr. Slade, I've been main bad. I can't stand the winters as I used to do, and the gout lays hold of me terrible now at times."

The speaker was a little dark, very dark, wiry man, with eyes like gimlets, whose countenance bore the traces of recent indisposition.

"You ought to be a bit more careful," replied Norman Slade. "It's no use, Bill, the old 'uns can't live with the young ones; you can't expect to take your liquor freely overnight and turn out to ride trials in the keen morning air, now you've got within the forties, without feeling it."

"Now don't you preach, Mr. Slade," rejoined Bill Smith, testily. "I should like to know what a man's to do when he can't get about to look after his horses. He must take a drop to comfort him; horses indeed! such a lot as they are too. I don't believe there's one of them worth a row of gingerbread. I tried my two-year-olds last October, and a pretty moderate lot they are. No chance of their doing any good as three-year-olds."

"You will have to get rid of them in selling-races," rejoined Slade, flipping the ash off his cigar. "I suppose they're good enough to do you a turn there."

"Well, I should hope so," growled the other, as he took a gulp of a mahogany-coloured mixture which no doctor would have dreamt of recommending for gout; "however, I shall be about again in a few days now, and then I must put 'em through the mill again and see what they're really fit for."

Bill Smith's was a common enough case: a man who now passed a good deal of his time between drinking-bouts

and severe attacks of the gout. One of the finest horse-men in England, he had at an early age established himself as one of the crack jockeys of the day. "Formidable at Epsom, invincible at Doncaster, and dangerous anywhere," had been the comment on his riding, only a few years back, by one of the shrewdest judges of racing on the turf.

Cast by nature in a light mould, he was exempt from a great deal of the abstinence and privation that forms so prominent a part of a jockey's life. Always a free liver, and of a convivial disposition, he had latterly allowed his craving for strong waters to get the upper hand of him. It began to be whispered about that "Black Bill," as he was called by his brother jockeys, was very often "half-cocked" when he got up to ride. It was some time before the fact became generally recognized. A man could ride as well half-drunk as sober, save in one respect; and it is just that which invariably cuts short the career of a jockey who takes to drinking, namely, that in the critical moments of a race he lost his head. Instead of taking advantage of every point in the game, he failed to note what his antagonists were doing; he got muddled; he timed his rush either too soon or too late. That deadly rush of his, for which he had once been so famous, and which had snatched so many races out of the fire on the very post, was now wont to be delivered at the wrong time. He who had been wont to measure his supreme effort to the very stride, now either won his race two lengths before the chair, or perhaps the same distance the other side of it; but he failed to win at the winning-post. Gradually his riding fell away from him; owners naturally ceased to employ a jockey upon whose sobriety there was no dependence. The same pitiless authority whom we have quoted above as giving such a laudatory opinion of Bill Smith's riding, now said "that he threw away more races than any man in England." The great stable of the North, which had held first claim on his services for many years, had now withdrawn its patronage; and the world generally frowned upon the once-famous jockey. Still, every now and then he astonished the turfites by a bit of brilliant riding worthy

of his best days. It was evident that his right hand had not lost its cunning, nor his nerve failed him; and that if only he could keep from drink the man was as fine a horseman as ever. Ah! the infinite conjectural probabilities of those "ifs!"

Bill Smith took the neglect of his old patrons bitterly. That he had lost the greater part of his business soured the man. True, it was from his own fault; and in his own breast he most likely acknowledged that it was so; but it rarely happens that upon these occasions a man does not put his own sins upon other people, and think all the more hardly of them on that account. In his palmy days, too, Bill Smith had been arrogant and coarse of speech to most of the turf officials with whom he came in contact; a bully amongst the younger jockeys and a very unscrupulous rider, to say the least of it, amongst those of his own standing. A man like this has not many friends when the tide turns against him; and, though his brethren of the saddle were chary yet of provoking the rough side of "Black Bill's" tongue, they made no disguise of their satisfaction when he threw a race away in consequence of his besetting failing. Two of his old friends they were who stood staunchly to him, in spite of his transgressions; and these were Norman Slade and Sir Ronald Radcliffe.

"I can't quarrel with the old fellow, Norman," Sir Ronald had observed after one of Bill Smith's later fiascos. "He's put me in for too many good things in his time for that, but I'll back him no more. He simply threw that last race away by coming too late."

It would have been well for Sir Ronald if he had adhered firmly to that resolution.

"Well," said Slade, after a pause of some minutes, "very little sleep does for me as a rule, but I feel tired to-night, and, as you know, when in the country am always an early man in the morning. I think I'll be off to bed. Shall you be out with the horses to-morrow morning?"

"No," returned the jockey. "I'm not rid of this confounded gout yet, and I am especially ordered to be careful about taking cold. You had better wrap well up, for you'll find the air confounded keen on the Wolds."

"I know all about it," rejoined Slade. "I suppose I shall find Tom Parrott in charge?"

"Yes, he is a right good lad is Tom. I don't know how I shall get on without him, for I've been able to look after the horses very little all this winter. Sure you won't have anything more before you go?"

"No; good night," rejoined Slade, as he picked up a hand-candlestick off the sideboard, "and I hope the enemy will let you sleep to-night. When you come down to breakfast I shall be able to tell you what I think of the three-year olds."

Bill Smith replied with a grimace, and turning to the fire observed as Norman left the room, "There's mighty cold comfort in that."

A little before eight the next morning saw Norman Slade attired in breeches, gaiters, stout shooting boots, and shooting-jacket, plodding up the winding road that led to the plateau. There, walking up and down, clothed in their rugs, were some half-score horses bestrode by stable-boys, the whole evidently under the control of a little man riding a clever-looking pony, and, though he was every day of five-and-thirty, was perhaps better known by the *sobriquet* of Bill Smith's head lad than by his legitimate appellation of Tom Parrott. The string, with one or two exceptions, were the property of Bill Smith himself, for few people cared to intrust the preparation of their horses to a man with Bill's unfortunate reputation. If he could not curb his propensity for strong waters when such urgent call upon his faculties was demanded as on the racecourse, was it likely that he would put any check upon himself on the training-ground? and the Turf, like all other professions, requires sobriety among its votaries.

Tom Parrott cantered briskly towards Norman the minute he saw him striding across the grand expanse of springy turf. It was not that he was going to do anything that all the world might not have seen, but he had all the instinctive jealousy of some trainers at finding his charges watched in their work.

"Mr. Slade!" he exclaimed, as he recognised his visitor. "Blamed if I didn't think it was one of those woudy touts.

Not, I am sorry to say, that we have anything worth their spying about, but I can't abide the varmin."

"Glad to see you looking so well, Tom," rejoined Norman. "No, Mr. Smith told me last night that you had nothing in the string that you had any hopes of. 'Tis so, sometimes, the stable gets clean out of form, and hasn't a horse in training good enough to win a saddle and bridle next year. Luck changes, and you sweep the board. What work are you going to give 'em this morning?"

"Well, they'll do a little slow cantering, and then old Knight-of-the-Whistle will lead the three-year-olds a smart mile spin. It's time to get on with them, you see, Mr. Slade; if they're ever to addle their keep, they ought to begin at the Newmarket Spring Meetings."

"Just so," said Norman. "You use the old gallop, I suppose? I shall go and stand about half up the rise at the finish, and then I shall see them well extended."

"Can't do better, sir," replied Parrott; and, turning his pony short round, he cantered back to his charges.

Slade made his way to the coign of vantage he had mentioned, unshipped his glasses, and gazed lazily at the horses, as on the other side of the down they went through some slow exercise. Presently he saw four of them walk quietly down to the mile-post, and knew that he was about to see the cream of Bill Smith's lot gallop. There was no keener race-goer than Norman Slade. No man more thoroughly loved racing for sheer sport; he could be as deeply interested in the issue of a trial on those Yorkshire Wolds as on the result of the Derby; but still, it was with languid curiosity he awaited the forthcoming gallop. There could be little interest in seeing a few notoriously bad horses scurry over their mile in an exercise-gallop. Suddenly his attention was aroused; before the quartet had gone a quarter of a mile he could see that the second, a slashing big brown colt, had got his head up, and was fighting with his rider. Another few seconds, and, dropping his head, he makes an angry snatch at the bridle, bolts out of the Indian file in which they are galloping, tears past old Knight-of-the-Whistle, and comes thundering along the gallop by himself.

"Got clean away with the lad," muttered Norman, as he watched the boy throw himself right back in his saddle, and strive in vain to check his horse; "but what on earth does old Bill mean by saying his three-year-olds are no good? If that's not a galloper I never saw one. What a stride he has! and how well under him he brings his quarters; now he is really going."

In vain the boy pulled; the big brown colt had completely overpowered him, and was bent upon doing a gallop entirely on his own account that morning. Norman watched him keenly as he swept past him, breasting the slight ascent like a lion, and going a good quarter of a mile past the termination of the gallop before his rider succeeded in pulling him up; he did so at last, and turned his mount a little ruefully to walk back. "It's well," he muttered, "that Parrott is in charge this morning instead of old Bill himself." Although it is at times impossible to prevent it, yet trainers look with considerable disfavour at a boy who lets his horse get away with him; and with a violent-tempered, coarse-tongued man like Bill Smith such a mistake was met with a volley of abuse. By this time Tom Parrott had joined Slade, and, walking his pony alongside of him, they both proceeded to meet the culprit.

"Well, you young duffer," exclaimed Parrott, "what possessed you to let him get his head up like that? You might have known that he would twitch the bit out of your hands directly he dropped his head. Now don't you say you couldn't help it. In the first place, you should have helped it; and in the second place, if I thought you could have helped it, you'd get your walking ticket this afternoon;" with which rather contradictory rebuke Mr. Parrott closed his lecture.

"Stop a moment, boy," said Slade, authoritatively; "I want just to look your horse over;" and Norman's practised eye at once took keen stock of the colt's understandings.

"Can't see much of him here, Tom, but I'll have a good look at him in the stable, where you can strip him for me; his legs look sound enough."

"Oh, he's sound as a bell," rejoined Parrott; "if he was only as good as he is sound he'd do."

"What do you call him, and how is he bred?"

"Belisarius, by Triumph, out of Darkness," rejoined Parrott, laconically.

"As stout blood as any in England," remarked Norman; "and what's more, Tom, as fine a mover as I've seen gallop for some time. Mr. Smith told me last night that he had tried all his three-year olds—good for nothing. Do you mean to tell me that brown colt was in the trial?"

"Yes, sir," replied Parrott, "and well beaten off."

"Well, Tom," said Slade, "did you see the colt go this morning? Can you shut your eyes to that? Who rode him in the trial?"

"One of the boys," replied Parrott. "I forget at this moment which, but I can easily ascertain."

"Do, Tom, as soon as you get back. I'll lay pounds to crowns the trial's all wrong. I'll come round, and have a look at Belisarius in his box after breakfast." And with that Slade strode away down the hill to satisfy the keen appetite that a morning on the Wolds was wont to induce. "It's all nonsense," he said to himself as he stepped smartly out in the direction of the farm-house. "That trial was all wrong, I'll lay guineas to gooseberries; old Bill was most likely too ill to superintend it himself, and, at all events, no doubt, never rode in it. Tom Parrott's a good head boy, but putting horses together is a little beyond him. If Bill had ridden in it he would have known what every horse in it was doing. As it is, I fancy Belisarius is a great big lazy colt that takes a deal of getting out. I don't suppose any of them ever saw him gallop till this morning. Well, come, I'm going to have a more amusing week than I reckoned on. I've at all events found out something to do. I've got to discover the rights of that trial, to induce Bill to try them again, and also to ascertain whether that big brown colt is entered for any stakes worth winning."

XVIII.—TRIAL OF BELISARIUS.

AS Norman entered the house his host called out to him from the parlour, "Is that you, Mr. Slade? Come along in, and we'll have breakfast up in a twinkling. I feel more like myself this morning than I have done for some time; the jaw with you last night did me good."

"Glad to hear it," replied Norman. "I'll just run upstairs and wash my hands and be with you in less than five minutes."

No sooner had Slade entered his bedroom than he dashed at once to his portmanteau, and eagerly took from it a volume of the Calendar bearing the title of "Races to Come." He turned over the leaves quickly. Yes, there it was, Belisarius, by Triumph, out of Darkness. It didn't take Slade's practised eye long to run over the horse's engagements. "By heavens!" he exclaimed, "if I should prove right, and my opinion be confirmed at the subsequent trial, I've discovered a veritable gold mine. Here's a three-year old entered for all the big races of the year whose name has never been even whispered among racing-men, who has never run, and whose very owner looks upon him as good for nothing. Now this is real fun. If we have got hold of a flyer, what a dressing we will give those south country stables. As for money we can win as much as we please over him. Properly worked, Radcliffe, Bill, and myself may stand to win perfect fortunes with very little risk." And so saying Norman Slade went down stairs to breakfast.

"Well! Mr. Slade," exclaimed the jockey, as Norman entered the parlour, "I hope you found an appetite upon the moor if you found nothing else. I suppose you saw all my rubbish."

"Rubbish, are they?" ejaculated Norman, "perhaps so. I wonder what you'd take for the three three-year-olds Knight of the Whistle led in their gallop this morning?"

"Have you got a commission?" inquired the jockey, eyeing his guest keenly. "If you have you may take

those three for a monkey, and I shall think myself well out of them."

"Well, Bill, you take my advice, don't you be in a hurry to part with those three for five hundred until you know a little more about them. How did you try them last back end?"

"They had a six-furlong spin with old Knight of the Whistle, as true a trial horse as ever was foaled. Two of 'em were tried at weight for age, but Belisarius I rather fancied, so I put him in at seven pounds less. The old horse cleaned out the lot, and as for my fancy, he finished last of all?"

"You neither saw it nor rode in it, I suppose," rejoined Slade.

"I certainly didn't ride in it, and I only half saw it. I was very ill, and it was a very misty day, and I left the management of the whole thing to Parrott."

"Well, then," retorted Slade, "I maintain your trial is no trial at all, and that you know nothing about your own young ones."

"You're a very tidy judge, Mr. Slade, and know a bit what you're speaking about," rejoined the jockey, not a little nettled, "but if you think you can learn me my business you are damnedly mistaken."

"Never supposed I could teach you anything, Bill," replied Norman, perfectly unmoved, "but no man ever lived who didn't make a mistake at times; and he never did so without there being a looker-on with half his brains who could point it out to him. If you had been well enough to ride in it yourself I should look upon that trial as conclusive. You weren't, and I look upon it as all skittles."

"I know what I'm about," rejoined the jockey, sulkily. "I'll come to you when I want to know the time of day, thank you; in the meantime you can't say you're invited to risk money on anything of mine."

"Now, do listen to reason, Bill," rejoined Norman, quietly; "don't say anything now—just turn it over in your mind. Give me three or four days to worm out what I can about that trial. You have got nothing to do,

remember, but to get well, and just before I leave you get on that brown colt, and see whether Knight of the Whistle can give him twenty-one pounds over a mile."

At first the jealous, irritable old jockey bluntly refused; said that he had satisfied himself about the brutes; that he was not going to trouble himself to get into the saddle to see how far Belisarius was behind a good horse; that Slade had better not waste his time in the experiment of turning Yorkshire geese into Epsom swans; but in his innermost heart Bill Smith began to ponder over what his guest had said; he knew that Norman Slade was a really right good judge of a thoroughbred. He had had, in the first instance, a great opinion of Belisarius himself, and in his best days the man's natural egotism had invariably prompted him to little belief in a trial in which he had not taken part. No man had more often expressed his disbelief in the issue of what he designated a "mooddling gallop," and he was forced to admit that this trial of his might strictly be described as such. As for Slade, he was much too clever a man of the world to touch upon the subject for a couple of days. He was up every morning to see Belisarius do his work, and the more he saw of him the more convinced he was that he was a good horse. He had got hold of the boy who rode him in that rough Yorkshire gallop at the back end of last year, and by dint of bribery, cajolery, and intimidation had at last wrung from him the confession that he had been so bad with boils on that occasion as to be perfectly unfit to ride, and quite unable to do justice to his horse.

Norman Slade communicated his discovery to Smith, who received the intelligence with a savage execration and a muttered growling, in which strong expletives and such terms as "Break every bone in his body," "Cut the little devil in two," etc., were alone audible; but Slade eventually smoothed him down, and pleaded that he had pledged himself the boy should go scatheless if he told the whole truth. "Besides," urged Norman, "it's no use thrashing him for his sins of five or six months back; the poor little beggar will doubtless commit himself again before long."

The jockey burst out laughing. "Well, Mr. Slade," he cried, "you are an ingenious advocate, but I'd as lief you weren't arguing for my defence. Don't hang him now, because you'll have another chance before long. Well, there's something in it, and I promise to let the young villain off this time."

"Thanks, it's very likely all for the best; nobody has the faintest idea that you hold a trump card in your hand. I want you to have another spin with them Saturday morning, and ride Belisarius yourself—it'll do you more good than all the doctors. Bill, if you find him what I think, don't ask him to do a heartbreaking thing, but still let us ask Belisarius the question in real earnest."

"Right you are, Mr. Slade; I shall be perpetually on the fidget till I know the worst, as old John Day always puts it."

There was an eager discussion that night at dinner between Slade and his host as to what weights should be apportioned to the Knight of the Whistle and Belisarius. The Knight was a five-year-old, who from his youth upwards had always been a fairly good horse. He was by no means first class, and his chief merit lay in his being a consistent performer. If he didn't win when he was expected, still he was always there or thereabouts; and on the training-ground, as Bill Smith always said, you might thoroughly depend on what a gallop with him told you as regarded the young ones. Slade insisted upon it that if Belisarius could beat the old horse, in concession of a stone, it would be quite good enough for the present, and then it would be time enough to try him a little higher later on, whilst Smith was for asking the sterner question at once. However, after much discussion, Slade's proposition was agreed to, and it was determined that the trial should come off on the Saturday morning.

Eight o'clock on that day consequently saw the little group gathered together at the mile-post. As on the first morning Slade had gone up to the moor, with this rather important difference, that old Bill Smith himself, his throat enveloped in many folds of a silk handkerchief, was on the back of Belisarius. Tom Parrott was down at the mile-

post to start them, while Norman took up his favourite position halfway up the ascent which terminated the gallop. All three boys had their orders, the best lad in the stable being put on Knight of the Whistle. At the word "Go!" one of the three-year-olds rushed to the front and made the running at a smart pace, the Knight lying second, while Belisarius was last of all. A quarter of a mile from home the leader had shot his bolt, and the running was immediately taken up by the other three-year-old, the Knight still lying second and Belisarius last. As they neared the ascent the Knight assumed the command and Belisarius crept rapidly up to him. Just before reaching Norman the brown colt, pulling double, reached the Knight's quarters.

"It's a monkey to a mousetrap on the young 'un," muttered Norman Slade, with a flush of exultation in his dark eyes, when suddenly Bill Smith stopped riding, eased his horse, and left Knight of the Whistle to gallop in two or three lengths in front of him.

"By Jove, it has been too much for him!" exclaimed Slade, as he hurried across to speak to the jockey. "What's the matter, Bill? Are you faint, or sick, or what is it?"

"Hush; nothing is the matter," replied Bill Smith, as he bent over his saddle-bow. "He's a flyer. I could have won the length of a street if I had gone on, but it would have been a sin to show him up."

This concluded the work for the morning. Belisarius was handed over to his boy, and Slade and his host, getting into the trap which had brought them up, made the best of their way home to breakfast. A very merry meal was that. The two men were very jubilant over the event of the morning.

"You are quite right, Mr. Slade; that colt is a good deal beyond the common. The horse will have a chance for any one of the big races that could beat the Knight at a stone. I could not only have beaten him this morning, but had a lot in hand besides."

"We know enough about Belisarius now," rejoined Slade, "at all events, to ensure your not parting with him with the other two for five hundred pounds. Now, nobody suspects you of owning a good horse at present. So

you can back him to win you a good stake for a very trifling outlay. You stick to the colt and leave the commission to be worked by Radcliffe and myself. The horse is very forward, so I suppose you'll run him for the Two Thousand?"

"Certainly, if all goes well," rejoined the jockey. "It's a big stake, and the opposition don't threaten to be strong. It's never any use keeping a good horse in the stable when he is fit to ride."

The next day was passed in much talk of bygone racing-lore. Bill Smith was highly elated at discovering that amongst what he had deemed his worthless string there was probably one very high-class racer. Money was scarce with him at the present moment, but it may be doubted whether five thousand would have induced him to part with the horse just now; and both he and Slade knew well that there were many men in England who would gladly give that sum for Belisarius on hearing the result of that morning's gallop. Everything was arranged between the jockey and his guest during that last evening.

Bill Smith had settled how much he could afford to trust his horse with for the Two Thousand Guineas, and either Slade or Radcliffe was to do that commission for him on the former's return to town.

To those three the secret of Belisarius's prowess was as yet, if possible, to be confined. On the Monday Bill Smith drove his guest to the nearest station, and Slade, to use his own expression, returned to town with the winner of the Derby in his pocket.

There was not a little curiosity at Tattersall's the succeeding Monday, when Sir Ronald Radcliffe lounged in a little before five, and asked, in his languid way, what they were betting on the Two Thousand.

"Three to one on the field," exclaimed one of the leading speculators. "What do you want to do, Sir Ronald—do you want it to money?"

"Thank you, Cookson," was the reply. "I don't want to back the favourite. What is Chelmsford's price?"

"Six to one," rejoined the bookmaker promptly. "What shall I put it down to?"

"You needn't put it down at all," rejoined Sir Ronald, carelessly. "Who'll make me a bid against one not mentioned in the betting?"

"What is it, Sir Ronald?" inquired two or three book-makers eagerly.

"Belisarius," replied the baronet.

"Beli, what?" cried Cookson. "How do you spell it?"

"There's the name," rejoined the baronet, as he showed a page in his betting-book upon which Belisarius was clearly written. "What will any one lay me to a hundred?"

"Never heard the name before," rejoined Cookson, sharply. "And it's not a very good betting-race, but if you like to have three thousand to a hundred, Sir Ronald, you can put it down."

"All right!" replied the baronet. "Does any one want to do it again?"

There was some little sparring, but eventually the same odds were laid to the same amount twice more. Then one of the speculators produced a "turf guide" from his pocket, and exclaimed, "Why, it's a dark colt of old Bill Smith's. Here's twenty to one, Belisarius, to a hundred. Who will have it?"

Sir Ronald simply shook his head, and, saying "that he had got quite sufficient," sauntered out of the subscription-room in his usual indolent manner.

The sudden appearance of Belisarius in the betting was much talked of for a day or two in racing-circles; and all sorts of wild rumours were current concerning old Bill Smith's dark three-year-old. But as no authentic information regarding him came to hand, and, in spite of the liberal offers of the bookmakers, nobody seemed to have the slightest inclination to back him, Belisarius faded once more out of the betting. And it was only now and again at intervals that here and there a very crafty speculator dribbled a little bit on him at long shots, on the sole ground as he explained that Sir Ronald Radcliffe wasn't a fool, and that there might be something in this dark colt after all. Still, at the rare intervals that the name of Belisarius cropped up in the betting, it was always at very long odds. As for Sir Ronald, he was a reticent man

concerning his turf transactions; and with a few intimates, who felt entitled to question him on the subject, he simply replied "that he had never seen the colt in his life, but that he believed those connected with him considered that he had a good chance for the Two Thousand."

In the meantime Belisarius strides away over the Yorkshire Wold in grand style; and old Bill Smith, who has entirely shaken off his gout, grows "sweeter" day by day.

XIX.—IN THE GAZETTE.

"—th Hussars. Charles Devereux, gent., to be Cornet, *vice* Langley, promoted. October 14th."

I WONDER if there is any man who has once worn Her Majesty's uniform who cannot recall the exultation with which he once read a similar notice in the *Gazette*. It is, in all probability, the first time he has ever seen his name in print; and, lightly though he may affect to take it, he still, whenever he can possess himself of the paper, reads that announcement furtively for the next day or two. If he does not carry his head a trifle higher, and feel inclined to put on some slight amount of swagger amongst his youthful acquaintance, then most assuredly he is not of the clay of which soldiers should be kneaded. Most of us, I should think, could remember the fever-heat of those few days after our first appearance in the *Gazette*; how anxiously we made ourselves acquainted with all the braveries of *our* regiment; and, for the matter of that, dedicated much time to the costumes of the British army generally. What special designation our corps might be known by in the slang of the service was also the subject of much delight and congratulation. Whether we were in the Slashers, the Springers, the Red Lancers, or the Dirty half-hundred, whether Black Watch or Cameron Highlanders, was a distinction which it was maddening that our civilian friends (we had begun to call them so by this time) failed to comprehend the importance of. Then

came all the fun of the outfit—the trying-on of our uniforms (that first experience of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war); and, though we have a dim recollection of getting our sword between our legs, of feeling exquisitely uncomfortable in the unaccustomed dress generally, and of a tendency to snigger, on the part of the tailor's young man, at the awkwardness we displayed in our new cloth and broideries, still, upon the whole, it was a joyous time, with life and the career of our choice all opening before us.

Charlie Devereux was delighted with the official letter that confirmed his appearance in the *Gazette*, and further informed him that he was granted leave of absence until the 31st of December, on which day he was requested to report himself to the officer commanding the —th Hussars, at York. Old Tom Devereux had been much pleased with his son's appointment. He authorized him to draw for a very liberal sum on account of his outfit, and further promised to make him a present of Pole Star for first charger, as soon as that gallant animal had fulfilled his engagement in the Autumn Steeplechase at Lincoln. About this latter there was considerable excitement at North Leach. The young one had no doubt come on a good deal during the year, and was a very much better horse than he had been in the spring. Charlie was once more to ride, and was sanguine about turning the tables on his successful antagonist of last March.

"I rode very green then," he cried, "and allowed myself to be gammoned out of the race. Whether I could have quite won I don't know, but I ought to have been much nearer, I am sure. I was looking after George Fletcher, when all the time it was Jim I ought to have been sticking to."

"Given the same animals and you ought to have the best of them this time," said John Devereux, "but there's no knowing what those Fletchers will run; and, remember, they are as full of dodges as an old dog-fox. Next time, Master Charlie, ride your own race, trust your own judgment, and don't hang upon them."

To fight the spring battle of the Carholme over again

would be to weary the reader. Suffice it to say that Pole Star fully justified the improvement claimed for him by his friends, and that Charlie, when they turned into the straight, having satisfactorily disposed of Jim Fletcher, felt like sailing in an easy winner, but half way up the distance, George Fletcher, who seemed to Charlie to have dropped from the clouds, as he had seen nothing of him after the first half-mile, challenged, and a desperate race home ensued between the pair, but Charlie this time had ridden his horse carefully, and Pole Star had a good bit left in him to finish with. Holding George Fletcher's riding in great respect, Charlie determined to let him get no nearer than he could help; he was a length to the good when the final struggle began, and in spite of all George Fletcher's efforts he could never quite get up, and Charlie was returned the winner by a good neck, to the great glory and jubilation of North Leach.

New Year's Day saw Charlie Devereux installed in his new quarters in the barracks at York; his baggage had been sent on in advance, and Bertie Slade had duly seen to the fitting-up of the two rooms destined to become his domicile for the present. He was in high spirits, disposed to like everything, and to make light of such disagreeables as are the inevitable portion of a soldier's novitiate. Recruit drill and the riding-school are necessities, but he must be a very enthusiastic soldier who can describe them as pleasures. He had been a little dashed by the confidences of a brother cornet who was still undergoing the discipline of the school.

"I shan't mind the riding-school," remarked Charlie, confidently; "I've been more or less on the top of a horse from my childhood, and was good enough to just win a steeplechase this autumn."

"So much the worse for you," rejoined his new chum. "Our riding-master will tell you that it's the fellows who think they can ride give all the trouble. Same way dismounted drill; the sergeant always says it's the gentlemen who thought they learnt it at their private tutor's that there's no getting it into. I thought that it would be a good thing to learn as much as I could before joining, and

now my persecutor says, 'You see, Mr. Robertson, there's so much to knock out of you before we can properly set to work on you.'"

"Well," replied Charlie, laughing, "I'm ignorant of everything, except having learnt to ride, well, we'll say, in my own fashion."

Charlie Devereux commenced his military career about three months before Norman Slade made that remarkable discovery on Bellaton Moor, but neither Bertie Slade nor himself were even aware of Norman's presence in Yorkshire.

Amongst many other people who had seen Charlie's name in the *Gazette* were the Kynastons. They were both, of course, aware that it was impending, and they both regarded it as a point to be utilised in their respective games of life. The Major had again taken on "The Firs" as a hunting-box; it suited him in some respects: first and foremost, he got the place cheap. It was not every one who cared to take a hunting-box in North Lincolnshire, where neighbours ran scarce, and there was little but the sheer sport to rely upon for amusement. Dick Kynaston was undoubtedly very fond of hunting in his own way; he took his pleasure leisurely in this respect now, but he gave the idea of a man who had been able to "ride a bit" in his youth. He was a constant attendant at the cover-side, and, though he always laughingly said his riding days were over, yet now and again, when fortune favoured him and the country was not too stiff, he could hold his own with the best in a fast thing. As for Mrs. Kynaston, as before said, she rode in a somewhat similar fashion, taking the *role* of a mere spectator for the most part, but some two or three times in the season showing that when she chose the best lady in the hunt would have to do all she knew to beat Kate Kynaston.

In these country quarters the Major always looked forward to doing a bit of horse-dealing, and though, whether in the Wolds of Lincolnshire or those of Yorkshire, experience had shown him how difficult it is to get the better of the natives in the matter of horseflesh, the Major was still keen as ever about picking up bargains in that way; then,

again, there were always Tally Ho Stakes and Gone Away Plates to be compassed, and it afforded the Major infinite amusement, if no profit, as witness his disappointment at Lincoln Spring Meeting, to pick up a horse that he fancied capable of carrying off such races.

In spite of his resolutions in the early part of the year he had supported Charlie once more in the Autumn Hunt Steeple Chase, and won a very nice little stake upon Pole Star. Young Devereux in a Hussar regiment quartered at York he considered would be decidedly worth cultivating. His far-seeing eye looked out upon a very pleasant billet for the York Races in the ensuing August. There was sure to be plenty of card-playing and billiards, besides the opportunities offered by the Knavesmire, and it was on these varied opportunities that the Major depended upon in great part for a living.

The Firs also suited Mrs. Kynaston for this winter; not only did it allow her to retain Charlie Devereux within her thrall, for whose devotion she honestly cared but little, but it also offered the best possible chance she knew of seeing something of Gilbert Slade, and in Gilbert Slade, between pique and caprice, Mrs. Kynaston was much interested.

It had been a mere whim in the first instance, but the indifference Slade had shown to her charms, and, latterly, his evident preference for Lettice herself, had aroused a very tornado in this wayward woman's breast. She had dwelt upon it, brooded upon it, what you will; but ended by conceiving herself passionately in love with the good-looking Hussar. Bertie Slade had run down for the day to Lincoln to see Charlie ride Pole Star, but he had so far put in no appearance at North Leach; and, now that Charlie had joined the regiment, it was not very likely that he would do so. Mrs. Kynaston had quite enough knowledge of things military to know that it was not very likely young Devereux would get leave for the first few months, until he had passed his novitiate, in fact; and it was hardly likely that Bertie would come to North Leach, unless he accompanied his friend.

Gilbert Slade, indeed, when young Devereux suggested

a run home to North Leach for a few days' hunting, laughed as he replied, "I can tell you what the chief's reply will be before you ask him. He will tell you, 'The York and Ainsty are quite good enough for you to hunt with for the present; and it will be time enough for you to go further a-field when you are through the school and have learned your drill.' No, no, the chief is a rare good sort for leave, but, as for your wanting it just after you have joined, he will regard that as unmitigated cheek."

Charlie accepted his comrade's dictum; in reality, he had no great desire to go back to North Leach. As far as hunting went, the sport around York would satisfy any man not wedded to the shires, and the new life was full of pleasure and amusement to a young fellow like himself. But then there were Mrs. Kynaston's instructions, that he was to be sure and come back, bring Mr. Slade with him, and have a week in his own country, if he could compass it. And Lettice, too, as she bade him good-bye, had said, "It would be awfully jolly, Charlie, if you and Mr. Slade can run down and have a good gallop or two with us before the season closes." Well, he had done his best; and, as it couldn't be managed, there was no help for it.

During the latter part of her stay in London Mrs. Kynaston had seen a good deal of Ralph Furzedon. It had been, in the first instance, because her husband had wished her to do so. Their intimacy had increased, because Furzedon eagerly cultivated her acquaintance; and, latterly, because she had seen her way into making use of him. To say that she had easily detected Furzedon's besetting ambition would hardly describe the case. The man had made a confidant of her from the first; she knew how anxious he was to push himself into society—the higher the better; but, at all events, into society of some sort to start with. She had done him more than one good turn in that respect, and Furzedon clung tenaciously to her skirts in consequence. Mrs. Kynaston had of late made up her mind that he should marry Lettie Devereux. Furzedon had thought Lettie a very pretty girl to start with; but it had never entered into his mind to make her his wife until Mrs. Kynaston not only planted the idea

there, but tendered it and ministered to it as a delicate flower requiring careful cultivation. She was always chanting Lettie's praises.

"That girl," she would say, "only requires to be seen to have half London at her feet. She is thrown away amongst that dowdy set of Mrs. Connop's; and she is so dreadfully loyal to her aunt that I can't induce her to come about a little under my chaperonage."

"I should have thought," Furzedon had rejoined, "that her family was hardly good enough to give her much chance in the matrimonial market."

"No chance!" replied Mrs. Kynaston, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Much you know about it. The bluest blood in the peerage in these democratic days mates either with beauty or money-bags, if it doesn't do worse than go to the *coulisses* for its countess. If Lettie Devereux only marries a man with a tolerably good fortune she will speedily be in what society she likes in London."

Now all this, if not strictly true, was so in great part. Lettie Devereux was a very pretty girl, quite likely to make a good match, and whose antecedents were little-likely to stand in her way should a man fall in love with her. Day by day all this sank deeper and deeper into Mr. Furzedon's mind. Mrs. Kynaston was far too clever ever to suggest that Lettie would suit him—she spoke of the girl always in the abstract, as one whom nature had so richly endowed that she must have a brilliant future before her, always accompanied by regret that that future was being muddled away by the bad start she had at Mrs. Connop's. Mrs. Kynaston dilated upon Lettie's charms in a manner that her own estimate of them hardly warranted. Lettie Devereux was undoubtedly a pretty girl, but she was not such a striking beauty as it suited her friend to make out. Anyway, the idea that it would be a good thing for him to marry Lettie Devereux was beginning to take a strong hold on Furzedon's mind. He was a considerably wealthier man than people had any idea of. Not only had his father left him very well off, but recently an uncle had died who had bequeathed to him considerable business of the same nature as the late lamented Furzedon's. He had turned

up his nose at his father's calling, but that was when he was young and foolish. A shrewd, grasping, hard man, devoted to money-making, he had determined to carry on this latter, under an assumed name, of course; but then most usury is conducted on such principles, and the person with whom a loan is contracted is apt to be a mere man of straw acting for a principal in the background.

Now one of the first negotiations that had fallen to Furzedon's lot after taking up his uncle's business had tickled that gentleman immensely. It may be remembered that Charlie Devereux, to meet his losses at Newmarket, had been obliged to borrow money from Ralph Furzedon; he had given his acceptance in acknowledgment to three bills of various amounts, but the total of which came to a considerable sum. Worried about this, Charlie, it may be borne in mind, had confided his troubles to Major Kynaston, and that gentleman had promptly found him the money with which to redeem those bills from Furzedon, but to do this the Major had simply to raise the money from a professional usurer. His knowledge of the money-lenders in the metropolis was extensive, and amongst others he had been in the habit of doing business with Ralph Furzedon's uncle, who traded, as before said, under an assumed name. It is easy to conceive how Mr. Furzedon chuckled upon discovering that the acceptances that were redeemed had only been rescued for acceptances of the same description bearing usurious interest instead of the modest five per cent. with which as a friend he had contented himself. In short, poor Charlie's bills had simply been transferred from one pocket to the other. Major Kynaston was in profound ignorance of this, he was aware of the death of the principal, but was informed when he called that the business was carried on as usual, and, having effected his business, had troubled himself no more.

XX.—THE TWO THOUSAND.

THE race for the Two Thousand draws near, and, though the betting thereon is languid in proportion to what it usually was in those grand old gambling days, still this could not be so much ascribed to the apathy of the sporting public as to the narrow circumscription of the betting. The race was regarded by those conversant in Turf matters as a certainty for Glendower. Such a gift, indeed, did it look to him, that it was rumoured there would be hardly any opposition. And out of the half-dozen possible runners quoted no one can imagine that any of the number had much chance of defeating the favourite colt, whose two-year old career had consisted of six or seven unbroken victories. Glendower, like the upas-tree, overshadowed and killed the market. In the teeth of his triumphant career it seemed sheer madness to back any of his opponents. And when there suddenly dawned upon the horizon a dim star like Belisarius, and when men having given time to collect such facts about him as that he belonged to Bill Smith, the famous north country jockey, and that he had been backed by one so intimately associated with Bill Smith's former triumphs as Sir Ronald Radcliffe, it was gradually whispered about that the Newmarket crack Glendower might meet his master in the dark colt from the "north cuntry."

It was not that Bill Smith and his friends had laid out much money on Belisarius, indeed they were in no position to do so—some eight hundred pounds at long odds had been the sum-total of their collective outlay; true they had also secured various long shots about the colt for the Derby; but none of them were in a position to risk much money on a race of any kind, let them fancy it ever so dearly. Sir Ronald, as bold a plunger as ever was seen, had from such reckless speculation so crippled his resources that a monkey was the utmost left to him to venture. Much less contented Bill Smith and Norman Slade; and therefore it was sheerly the money of the people and a few

astute Turfites that forced Belisarius into a prominent place in the betting.

If there is one thing the speculative public are specially fond of in connection with a race-horse it is a dark colt in the hands of a well-known man at long odds. And this was just the year to foment such a fancy. It was all very well to say Glendower must win, but to back Glendower meant the taking of a very short price about that noble animal's chance. Amongst the others it was impossible to make out with any due regard to their previous performances that any of them could have the slightest chance of beating the favourite. There is no telling how good a horse may be that has never run; it is equally true that the converse of the proposition holds good.

"Bill Smith is a clever man," argued the public, "and is a great horseman still, if he chooses to take care of himself; it is quite evident that he fancies this colt of his, and there is no better judge than he, surely he will keep steady to ride his own horse, and if he only does that old Bill's good enough to tackle the very best of 'em yet." And thus reasoning the ever-sanguine army of backers began, with that heroic constancy that ever characterises them, to stake their money freely on Belisarius. In vain did bookmakers ask each other what this might mean. The cry had gone forth that Belisarius "was good goods for The Guineas." And those who went down to the lists and staked, and their number was numerous as those who go down to the sea in ships, with one accord invested their money on the dark colt of the North. And thus it came to pass, that as the race drew nigh Belisarius was installed a second favourite. It was rumoured indeed that, though quoted at two or three points longer odds in the betting, he for all that carried more money than the hitnerto unbeaten Glendower.

Norman Slade and his brother conspirator, Sir Ronald, were in as high a state of excitement as it was possible for two veteran Turfites to arrive at. Every two or three days brought Norman Slade a mysterious telegram from Bellaton Moor, couched in agricultural language that must have somewhat mystified the clerks on the transmission of the message. Such intelligence as "Sheep doing well," "Mut-

ton still commands a good price," etc., etc., seemed hardly worth flashing through the wires, but all such messages conveyed to Slade the assurance that Belisarius was progressing favourably and was in the best of health. There are two more of our acquaintances who are also much interested in the coming result of the Two Thousand, and these are Bertie Slade and young Devereux. Norman, as was his custom, had written to his favourite nephew some three or four weeks back, and informed him that if he would like to have a bet upon The Guineas he could stand a tenner in his, Norman's, book. Now it so happened that when he received this letter Charlie Devereux was sitting in his quarters, and had just been unbosoming himself of his troubles with regard to those bills. The Major's friendly assistance had of course proved only temporary; the question had, as it inevitably must, reopened itself once more, with the unpleasant addition that, like the snowball, these bills had gathered bulk as time rolled on. Charlie had taken very much to Slade almost from the very first; to begin with, he might have been said to almost owe his commission to Gilbert; then, again, he had all the admiration that a facile disposition always has for a hard reticent character so exactly its antithesis. The trouble of these bills weighed heavy on the young man as it is wont to do with young men who are so free with their autograph in the dawn of pecuniary difficulties. He had just made a clean breast of it to Gilbert.

"I can't go to the governor about it. You see, he has just had to shell out an awful lot of money for the outfit, horses, etc., to say nothing of his having had to pay up a good bit for me when I was at Cambridge."

"Well, you see, Master Charlie, this is rather a stiff order; to get you out of your scrape requires a thousand pounds, and I tell you honestly, unless your father will assist you, I don't see to whom you can apply. Very few of us are blest with a relation whom we can ask to help us over such a shocking tall stile as this. Let me think," and for a few minutes Gilbert Slade stared into the fire, and seemed wrapped in thought.

To do Charlie justice, no idea of seeking any other aid

than advice had ever crossed his brain when he confided his troubles to his new friend. As for Gilbert, if only half-a-dozen years older in age, he was many years older in knowledge of the world than his comrade. "A deuced bad start," he thought, "for a young one to join hampered in this way; of course he must come to his governor in the end, but, as he says, it is rather an inopportune moment to bring his necessities before him just now."

"Now, Devereux," he said, at last, "I've thought it all over, and I'll tell you what you must do. It is clear as noonday that your father will have to pay those bills sooner or later. You ought to have made a clean breast of it when you were gazetted, and told him then and there, that, unless he was prepared to pay that sum for you, your joining the regiment was an impossibility. No use talking any more about that, you didn't do it. The question is, What you had better do now? First of all, you must write to Kynaston, and ask him on what terms he can make arrangements for carrying over those bills for another six months; secondly, I can put you in the way of a chance of winning as much money as might suffice for that purpose. It won't pay them, but it will possibly obviate the necessity of going to the home authorities for another six months."

"That would be a great point," replied Charlie, ever willing to postpone the unpleasant explanation if possible, and at the same time keen to learn what it was his friend was about to recommend, for he already conjectured that the opportunity of winning money Gilbert spoke of was in some way connected with the Turf.

"I've just heard from my Uncle Norman," replied the other, "and he has offered to let me stand in ten pounds with him about a horse he has backed for The Guineas. Now, if you like, this time to, I'll ask him to let me have a pony, and we will go halves in it. It won't make much difference to you if you do lose those few pounds."

"What's the horse?" exclaimed Charlie. Gilbert Slade laughed as he replied, "When my Uncle Gilbert distributes his benefits he takes very good care there shall be no idle babbling. I can't tell you, because I don't know."

He makes me that offer, and all he says is, 'The horse will run well, and stands at very much longer odds at present than he has any business to do.' Those who know Norman Slade will tell you that's a good deal for him to say, and I put much more faith in it than I should in the most glowing account of any one else."

"It's very good of you, and I'm only too glad of the chance. I hope we shall have the excitement of knowing what the horse is before the race is won."

"Never fear," replied Bertie; "there's no more business-like man than my uncle. Two or three days before the race I shall get a line containing the exact note of the bet; but Uncle Norman is always mute as the grave about stable secrets till it is too late for their disclosure to be of any consequence."

It is the morning of the Two Thousand, and the furore for Belisarius had somewhat cooled down. The horse had arrived at Newmarket all right a couple of days previous, and had duly galloped and been looked over on the Heath. But he failed to please the *cognoscenti*. Newmarket, ever prejudiced against a horse not trained in their midst, picked all sorts of holes in Belisarius. His action was lumbering; he was coachy; he looked like a non-stayer; he would tire to nothing in the last two hundred yards. Such were the verdicts of the horse-watchers, and also of others who ought to have been better judges of the northern colt's powers.

"Well," said Sir Ronald, with just the faintest shade of anxiety perceptible in his tone, as stepping from the "special" he was met on the platform by Norman Slade, "how's the colt? They've been rather knocking him about in the London market the last twenty-four hours."

"Fit to run for his life," rejoined Slade; "and, what's equally to the point, old Bill is very fit too. He is keeping himself wonderfully quiet, sticking to his horse; and is not to be drawn into sitting up and conviviality. He is in real earnest this time; but, if it comes off, I'm sadly afraid he will make up for his present self-restraint. If he wins on Belisarius to-day I'm afraid he'll make a royal night of it."

"They don't think much of Belisarius here, I suppose?" said Sir Ronald, as they got into the fly which was to convey them to Norman Slade's lodgings, so that the baronet might get something to eat before starting for the course.

"No," replied Slade; "Newmarket never believed in a north-country horse till it has well beaten all they have got to bring against it."

On the Heath, from the very beginning of the racing, it was matter of universal comment what a dull affair the great race of the meeting was likely to prove. It was now known that the field had dwindled down to half-a-dozen runners; and, though all of these were backed in some fashion, still it was only Glendower and Belisarius who were backed in anything like earnest. As a well-known member of the Jockey Club observed, "If it hadn't been for the advent of this dark colt from the North the Two Thousand would have been for all practical purposes a walk-over." Belisarius, although he might not find favour with the Newmarket people and the majority of racing-men, yet had lost none of his attraction for the public. The dark horse who had never yet been seen on a race-course, and against whom five and six to one could be obtained, had a fascination for them that outbalanced all Glendower's victories, and they steadily supported their champion in defiance of the sums that went down upon the favourite at a price that had gradually shortened to seven to four. However, the saddling-bell has rung, the competitors are arranged in the birdcage, and in a few minutes more make their way down to the starting-post. For a moment Bill Smith checks his horse and bends over his shoulder as he passes Norman on his way out.

"It's all right, Mr. Slade," he murmurs. "I shall just come straight away from the Dip and strangle them."

Norman simply nodded in reply, and then went off with Sir Ronald to witness the race.

The tale of that Two Thousand is soon told. The handful of horses were easily despatched by the starter, and run at a muddling pace for a good half the distance. Descending the hill Glendower assumed the lead and improved the pace. At the Bushes he came right away from his field,

with the exception of Belisarius, who was going strong a bare two lengths in rear on the whip hand. As they breasted the ascent the north-country colt ran up to his antagonist and challenged, and for the next hundred yards it was a ding-dong struggle between them. Then Belisarius got the best of it, and, wearing down his antagonist, Bill Smith came right away in the last fifty yards and won easily by a couple of lengths.

A great cheer rent the air as the numbers went up; but in the Jockey Club stand, and amongst the gentlemen generally, there was a portentous silence. Neither was there much exultation shown by the bookmakers; it was the general public that had won the money, and it was the lungs of the general public that boisterously proclaimed their satisfaction at the result of the race.

"A great *coup*," said Slade; "but nothing to what we will bring off at Epsom."

"It is a *coup*," replied the baronet; "and we ought to have a good chance of winning the Derby, and our double-event money as well. Belisarius appears to me as sound a colt as ever I looked over."

"Yes," rejoined Slade, "he is sound enough wind and limb. I'm not afraid of the horse, it's the man. Belisarius will stand the training all right. I wish I felt as certain about Bill Smith."

"I should think he might be trusted to keep steady now till after the Derby," replied the baronet.

"I don't know," replied Norman Slade; "you see, he was short of money and shaky of reputation; and the bringing off this Two Thousand meant a good deal to him. Men like Bill don't thrive upon success."

XXI.—"YOU SHALL NEVER MARRY HIM."

GREAT was Charlie Devereux's exultation when the telegram reached York containing the news of Belisarius's victory. A formal line had been received by Bertie from his uncle a couple of days before, in which he

notified the fact that Bertie had an excessively nice bet of six hundred to twenty-five against Belisarius for The Guineas, and now this comfortable stake was satisfactorily landed. As for young Devereux, with the sanguine nature of youth, he at once saw himself clear of all his financial difficulties.

"It's all your doing, old fellow," he cried, as he clasped Bertie's hand warmly. "I'm awfully grateful; it was a great inspiration of mine to come and bore you with all my troubles."

"Never mind about that, but just bear in mind, Master Charlie, you're a long way off being out of the wood at present. You've won three hundred pounds, but you don't suppose the holder of those bills will let you renew without a bonus, do you? You are in the hands of the money-lenders now. I'm happy to say I've never been driven to seek their services myself; but I've had something to do with them on behalf of a great pal of mine, and am tolerably well versed in the ways of those gentlemen. The holder of those bills, in the first place, will make you pay pretty smartly for their renewal. I should guess about a hundred pounds. How are you going to pay off a thousand pounds with the remaining two hundred?"

"Don't you see?" replied Charlie, with a look of preternatural sagacity; "of course I immediately put that two hundred on Belisarius for the Derby—he's at three to one now—providing your uncle fancies his chance. Well, if that comes off, I shall have got eight hundred together towards clearing myself."

"Good!" replied Bertie; "how about the remainder? Remember, there'll be another six months' interest on, which, at the price you are paying, will have added a hundred and fifty to the original debt."

"I forgot that," replied young Devereux, as his countenance fell somewhat; "I suppose there'll be nothing for it, then, but to make a clean breast of it to the governor."

"That's right," said Slade; "you do that. Wait till after the Derby; and then, win or lose, let them know the worst at home. It's better, anyhow, that you should be ~~let in~~ for one month's interest rather than six."

And so it was agreed between them that Charlie should await the result of the great struggle on Epsom Downs, and then confess the scrape he had got into to old Tom Devereux.

A very few days brought a letter from Major Kynaston; and Bertie's knowledge of the ways of money-lenders proved only too accurate. The Major wrote,—

“MY DEAR DEVEREUX,

“I have just made the best terms I can with Jordan & Co., but they will have their pound of flesh, you know. Robbers, rank robbers, every one of them; but pray bear in mind that when I first suggested your applying to them you were dreadfully oppressed by the weight of your obligations to Furzedon. I agreed with you, as any man in the world would, that, bad as was the necessity for seeking assistance from a professional money-lender, it was better than remaining under such an obligation to a friend. The rascals insist on having a hundred down, and in consideration of that will let the bills run on for another six months, at fifteen per cent. for that time. This is the best I can do for you. Give me your consent, and enclose a cheque for the hundred, and you will hear no more of Jordan & Co. for six months.

“Ever yours,

“RICHARD KYNASTON.”

“The scoundrels!” exclaimed Bertie, after reading this letter. “You must stick to your resolution, Devereux; win or lose at Epsom, mind. These vultures are charging you just forty per cent. for the accommodation.”

Bertie Slade could have only guessed the state of the case; scoundrels would have been not half a strong enough word to have applied to the robbers into whose clutches young Devereux had fallen. In the first place, half the bonus went into Kynaston's pocket, for having introduced Mr. Devereux to Jordan & Co. Secondly, as we already know, Jordan & Co. was no other than Ralph Furzedon. Consequently, poor Charlie in reality was being shamelessly

stripped and plundered by a couple of men whom he looked upon as intimate friends.

The following week brought a most satisfactory letter from Norman Slade, intimating that he had paid six hundred pounds into Bertie's account at Cox's, and saying that he fancied Belisarius's chance for the Derby very much. "The Two Thousand Guineas," he went on to say, "was a good public trial; and I can only say, he beat Glendower a good deal more easily than we expected. He is as well now as one could wish him; and, should he only continue so, it will take a right good colt to beat him at Epsom." It need scarcely be said that this letter thoroughly confirmed Charlie Devereux in his resolution. He sent off the required cheque to Kynaston, and forthwith proceeded to put the remainder of his winnings on Belisarius for the Epsom race; and that done, as he said to Bertie Slade, "There is nothing now for me to do but to sit down and wait. I feel like a man who has insured himself to the extent of his ability."

"Yes," rejoined Slade, laughing, "we can only trust that the insurance office may not prove a bogus concern. Such insurance as yours is hardly recommended by our grave and reverend signors."

"What a disagreeable beast you are, Bertie," cried young Devereux, laughing; "I don't see why you should always take such a gloomy view of my affairs."

"Not at all," rejoined Slade, "you'll pull through all right enough; I was only laughing at the queer view you take of things. You speak as if you had done a highly virtuous action in endeavouring to extricate yourself from your difficulties by putting every shilling you can lay your hands on on this race. I doubt, for instance, if your father would quite view it in that light."

"Don't preach, Bertie; I cannot work, and to beg I am ashamed. If I only knew how to make this money by work, you'd see I wouldn't flinch from it. This is my sole chance; and I don't see much harm in dashing down my winnings again."

"Nor is there," rejoined Bertie, still laughing, "only don't take quite such a high moral tone about it. Hur-

rah for Belisarius! I shall trust him with a pony myself, just to pay expenses; and, if all's well, in the Derby week we'll run up and see the race. A week's leave is always given to all who wish to assist in that festival."

Mr. Furzedon, during the autumn months, had been turning over Mrs. Kynaston's advice in his own mind. He had at last come to the conclusion, considerably swayed in his judgment, be it borne in mind, by the aforesaid Mrs. Kynaston, that Lettice Devereux would make him a very suitable wife. Shrewd, quick-witted, and cynical, the man judged for himself, and pretty accurately, in that world he knew—the world of the race-course, of club, smoking-rooms, of the stage, the demi-monde; but of that social world to which he aspired Ralph Furzedon was not only very ignorant, but credulous in the extreme to those whom he believed to have its *entrée*.

The Kynastons he thoroughly believed to possess this passport. That Dick Kynaston was what he was did not in the least surprise Furzedon; he was quite prepared for lax morality in high places. The papers unfortunately bear pretty constant evidence that the cream of society is no better than its humbler brethren on those points. What did tickle Ralph Furzedon amazingly was, that while he as a tacit partner with Kynaston was, when opportunity served, introducing young men with expectations to the Major, that worthy—all unconscious—was bringing them back to Jordan & Co., *alias* Ralph Furzedon, for relief of their necessities.

But in Mrs. Kynaston Mr. Furzedon believed immensely. He looked upon her as a clever woman, moving in the very best society, and, to use his own expression, "Knowing the ropes, able to hold her own with the best; little likely to make any mistake in her judgment of things." "And," said Ralph Furzedon to himself, "this woman looks upon it that Lettice Devereux will give any man with a little money, who marries her, a great social start."

In almost any other groove of life the man would have depended upon his own judgment, but upon this point he was not only crazed but conscious of his ignorance. We have all our ambitions; and Ralph Furzedon's was to force

his way into the best society. He had always admired Lettice, but had never dreamt of her as a wife till the idea had been distilled into his mind by Mrs. Kynaston. He had plenty of assurance, and perhaps rated his personal appearance as high as most people. He was a good-looking man, but there was that indefinable something which the moment he came amongst experts would be certain to arouse curiosity as to his antecedents. Still, with all his self-confidence, though he hardly liked to admit it, he had a hazy idea that Lettice Devereux was not quite the girl to be had for the asking; that she was a young lady upon whom the revelation of his wealth might produce but little impression; and, moreover, that she was quite capable of not being properly impressed with all the advantages—personal and otherwise—that he was prepared to lay at her feet.

Like the astute calculator he was, Mr. Furzedon at once began to reckon what trumps he held in his hand. He thought he could depend upon Mrs. Kynaston to forward his interests, and he looked upon her as a very tower of strength could he but prevail upon her to espouse his cause. "Then," he thought, with an evil smile, "there are those bills of Charlie's; a cornet in a fast Dragoon regiment is not likely to get much nearer liquidating them, and they grow, they grow. I wonder, by the way, how the deuce he found that last hundred to renew with! Well, well, sisters before now have been known to wed to help a favourite brother out of a scrape; when the time comes, I trust Lettice Devereux will be too entangled to escape. I wish that fellow Slade didn't hang about her quite so much. Unlucky for me, Charlie getting into the same regiment; she is likely to see more of him on that account; and, from all I can make out, it strikes me he has no idea of neglecting such opportunities as fall in his way. If he ever wants to borrow money I'd make it easy for him. I'd risk a good deal to get him upon my books."

"I suppose you have given up all hope of seeing Charlie down again this season?" said Mrs. Kynaston, one afternoon that Lettie had ridden over to call upon her.

"Yes; he declares that he cannot get away, and raves

about the sport he is having with the York and Ainsty, and how splendidly Pole Star carries him. Brothers are awfully selfish. No; I didn't quite mean that; but Charlie knew I had so reckoned upon his coming down and our having a few more gallops together."

"Ah, well," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, "men are fond of change; and just at present your brother is dazzled with all the glitter of a mess, and the swagger of a military life generally. Still, I do wonder he has not come home. I should have thought he would have been unable to resist the pressure put upon him."

"I'm sure I've said all I can," replied Miss Devereux.

"Ah," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, with a most provoking smile, "I was thinking of a much stronger influence than yours, my dear. If Mr. Slade had been as much in earnest as we had thought him ——"

"You have no right to say we," interrupted Lettie hotly; "I am sure I never thought ——"

"Of course not," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston in her turn, "as I thought him, he'd have made Charlie bring him down to North Leach before now."

"There is nothing to prevent Mr. Slade coming here on his own account, if he pleases. Father gave him a general invitation to come and have a few days with the Brocklesby any time he liked this winter."

"What, when you were at Lincoln?" replied Mrs. Kynaston.

Lettie nodded.

"He can hardly be said to have shown himself keen to take advantage of the invitation."

"I suppose he waited to come with Charlie, and now he finds Charlie can't come it is getting too late."

"I don't believe in that 'can't come.' I know too much of soldiering for that. A man may not be able to get away a certain week, but don't tell me he can't get away any week in the course of the winter. Depend upon it, Mr. Slade has not been half a dozen years in the army without being able to tell your brother how a trifle like that might be managed."

Now out of her military lore Mrs. Kynaston did know

that Charlie would have most likely some difficulty in obtaining leave just at present, but she was anxious for her own purposes to make Miss Devereux believe that Gilbert Slade was not in earnest in his attentions. He had no doubt shown much devotion to Lettice during the latter part of his stay in town. Mrs. Kynaston had not been present at the Lincoln autumn races; but she had gathered that Gilbert had hardly left Lettie's side the whole day, and had heartily accepted old Tom Devereux's cordial invitation to “come and bite a bit with us, Mr. Slade, and have a look at the hunt in our country.”

But many such invitations are given every year, and, though both sides are thoroughly in earnest in the contract, circumstances forbid their ever coming to pass. Mrs. Kynaston was too wise to say more, but she had attained her object in some measure. Lettie's pride had taken fire at the thought that she was beginning to think seriously about a man who was simply indulging himself in an idle flirtation with her.

“Have you seen anything of your other admirer?” asked Mrs. Kynaston, after a rather prolonged pause.

“My other admirer?” replied Lettie; “I'm sure I don't know who you mean—I certainly can count perhaps half-a-score men who were very civil to me, and liked to dance with me, but I really couldn't single out one with any apparent desire for anything more.”

“How innocent we are,” replied Mrs. Kynaston, laughing. “My dear Lettie, you don't require to be told that Mr. Furzedon adores the very ground you walk on.”

“Nonsense,” replied Miss Devereux, “he has always been civil, as an intimate friend of Charlie's naturally would be, but I'm sure he has never said a word of the kind you suggest to me—and what's more I don't think I much like Mr. Furzedon.”

“I wouldn't be in too great a hurry to make up my mind about that,” said Mrs. Kynaston, “he is a good-looking man, and Dick tells me he has lots of money. I assure you many girls would think twice before they would say Ralph Furzedon nay.”

“Well, it doesn't matter,” rejoined Lettie. “You are

quite mistaken; it is not likely I shall be called upon to decide that question; and now I must scamper home, if you will allow me to ring for my horse." A few minutes more, and Miss Devereux had said "good-bye." Mrs. Kynaston stood watching her as she mounted. "Yes," she muttered, "I like you better than any girl I ever met; and I'd have been loyal to you, too, Lettie, if Gilbert Slade had not come between us; but I cannot give him up to you. You shall never marry him, if it is within my power to prevent it."

XXII.—MR. BLACK'S TIP.

THE winter presses hard upon the poorer classes generally; work becomes scarce, and days become short, just as we seem to require more light, more food, more fire, more clothes, more everything. Our wants expand as the means to supply them shorten; or, sad to say, in some cases disappear altogether. The sole trade that seems to thrive in this dark time is that of the burglar, who finds the season propitious; and, if he has the good fortune to evade the emissaries of the law, easily acquires the wherewithal to indulge in the riotous living in which his soul delighteth. Upon no class, perhaps, does a hard winter press more heavily than the hangers-on of the Turf: men who, while racing is going on, pick up a mysterious living as small bookmakers, as horse-watchers, as turf-advisers to young (can't be too young) gentlemen. I am speaking of those who are "indifferent honest." As for the scum, who are a disgrace to our racecourses, it is more than probable that they take to burglary during the winter months; having spent the summer in robbery, there would be nothing repugnant to their feelings in housebreaking during the close term.

But, to see these small betting-men, who in the summer season are so blatant, boisterous, and self-assured, habited in white hat, and the remarkable coats they affect, and then to see the limp, luckless individuals, who with dilapi-

dated hat, scanty raiment, and broken boots, who in hoarse tones, more graphically designated a "gin-and-fog voice," murmur into your ears a hope that you can spare half-a-crown, or peradventure half-a-sovereign, to assist a broken-down sportsman. To see them, I repeat, in the chrysalis form, it is hard to believe them to be the same individuals. The brazen self-assurance is all out of them now; and they really are as hard put to it for a living as any class in modern Babylon. They are to be met with, for the most part, anywhere between Charing Cross and St. Paul's Cathedral; they gravitate principally towards the Ludgate Circus. Among these men, Sam Prance was a good typical specimen of his class; he had begun life as assistant to a pawnbroker, and that pawnbroker had been Ralph Furzedon's uncle; hence had arisen a connection between them. What had produced the undying enmity which Prance bore to the man who now stood in his dead master's shoes is about to be explained. From his boyish days Ralph Furzedon was precocious, vicious, and cunning; and even at fifteen began to gamble on the turf. He was liberally supplied with money by his guardians, and the Jewish instinct in his veins led him even then to turn over such capital as he possessed by speculating in the unredeemed pledges in his uncle's shop. He would often, with the assistance of Prance, invest money, say in the purchase of a ring. This would be left exposed for sale in the shop window. In the course of two or three weeks a pound or two profit would usually be realised by the sale of it. Such profits young Furzedon, again through Prance, invested on the turf; he was shrewd, he was fortunate, and the result of his betting was decidedly profitable.

The first thing fatal to Prance in his connection was, that he too got bitten with a taste for turf speculation. Like all beginners, he was lucky at first, and this led to too great intimacy between young Ralph and himself. Furzedon became an habitual visitor at Prance's house. Mrs. Prance was a pretty and extremely vain young woman; the compliments and attentions of her visitor turned her head; don't mistake me, and think there was anything as yet further than the most open flirtation

between them, but Furzedon's flatteries sank deep into Mrs. Prance's mind. That she was a very pretty woman, and that if she was only properly dressed she would have the world at her feet, became part of Mrs. Prance's creed. Sam was making money; it was ridiculous, he must allow her more for dress. They must live in better style, and so Prance was gradually worried into giving up the modest and comfortable tenement in which he had dwelt for the last three years in favour of a showy, comfortless, suburban villa. He vowed he couldn't afford it, but, for all that, he took it.

Mrs. Prance was not an atom in love with her boyish admirer, but for all that she was very proud of her captive; he belonged to a class superior to her own, at all events in her eyes, and the lady had a halcyon dream of being surrounded by a knot of admirers—*gentlemen*—and not mere tradesmen, like most of her husband's friends. Well! the sequel was not long in coming. Luck turned, and Prance, who had been very far from confining his speculations to such as were deemed advisable by his young patron, got into difficulties, the usual result was the consequence. Sam Prance, if he did not actually, metaphorically "put his hand in the till;" he was detected in dishonest practices by his master, and though old Nicholas Furzedon declined to prosecute, yet Mr. Prance was promptly turned out of his situation, and told that he need look for no recommendation from his employer to assist him in procuring another, that he might consider himself fortunate to have escaped the inside of a prison.

And now came slow and grinding misery for Sam Prance, his goods were sold, and he had to move into shabby lodgings, carrying with him a peevish, discontented wife. With the final catastrophe Furzedon directly had nothing to do; whether his relations latterly had been as innocent with Mrs. Prance as the lady protested, her husband had many jealous misgivings, but certain it was, that when after months of wrangling she finally left her home Furzedon was not the partner of her flight. From that date, Prance regarded Furzedon as the originator of all his troubles; despairing of employment, he had sunk into

a mere jackal of the racecourse, and when times grew hard with him appealed to Furzedon for assistance, this, in the first instance, had been somewhat grudgingly extended, but no sooner did that gentleman detect an obvious disposition on Prance's part to live upon him than he repelled him with the utmost scorn; he even taunted the wretched man with his bad luck, and declared that his wife had been right to leave so pitiful a creature. The idea that at first possessed Prance's morbid mind seethed and festered. He traced every ill that had befallen him to Furzedon's door. It was true enough that, in some fashion, it had been Ralph Furzedon's precocious devilry that had wrought his undoing, but, for all that, his own weakness and cupidity had not a little to say to it. Further applications for assistance were met with still more bitter rejoinders on Furzedon's part, until the quarrel between them finally culminated when, flushed by drink, Prance had attempted to rob Furzedon that night in the Haymarket, and been stricken to the ground. A righteous blow was that cruel left-hander, a blow such as a man is well justified in defence of his property, but it filled to the brim the cup of Sam Prance's animosity, and his own prayer was that the day might come when the opportunity would be given him to settle accounts with Ralph Furzedon. He was quite aware that he held many secrets of that gentleman, and information as to his mode of life, which, though in no way inimical to him in a legal sense, might, deftly promulgated at the proper moment, be his social ruin, and no Indian on the war-trail bided his opportunity with more vengeful vigilance than did Sam Prance.

Fortune, it so happened, was throwing the chance he longed for into his way. Major Kynaston was one of Mr. Prance's most liberal patrons. The broken man had conceived a strong liking for the Major; he knew him to be no fool, though he was free-handed. He would toss his jackal a sovereign sometimes, saying good-humouredly, "Your information is not worth a cent. I've later myself concerning the horse; and know that, however well you saw it gallop last Friday morning, it will not be seen at the post; the stable can't get their money on. Never

mind; you're hard up, as usual, I dare say; take that, and perhaps next time you will be able to tell me something better worth knowing."

So far, Mr. Prance was in ignorance of the connection between the Major and Furzedon. That they were acquainted he was aware. He had seen them speak on a racecourse, but he had no idea that their acquaintance was other than of the most ordinary description. Still, it is more than likely that a clue to their association will be before long in Sam Prance's hands, though what use he will be able to make of such knowledge when he comes to it is not quite so clear.

Sam Prance had lived through the winter months he really hardly knew how, but never had he been harder put to it to keep the wolf from the door than he had this time. It was the period of the year at which there was little chance of his running across his racing patrons, men to whom he could appeal in extremity. He had the address, it is true, of some of these who employed him as a tout, and rewarded him for such information as he might send them; but a man like Prance, who had not the means requisite for leaving London, had small opportunity of picking up intelligence, and to all other appeals his patrons had mostly turned a deaf ear. Dick Kynaston was a bright exception. Like most buccaneers, the Major, as before said, was free-handed. He had been fortunate during the autumn months, whether by cards or racing matters little; and had contrived in his own vernacular, "to land a nice little pot." He replied to Prance's piteous cry for assistance by sending him a five-pound note, and the man felt more than ever grateful for such help in his present extremity. With the season Mr. Prance resumed his regular vocation; he was by turns tout, betting-man, and tipster. As a tout he had no information to impart, to resume the calling of a betting-man he must first acquire some small amount of capital, but to be a tipster requires nothing beyond pen, ink, and paper, and a modest amount of postage-stamps. But Mr. Prance was dead out of luck, and even his guesses at the winners of the Lincolnshire Handicap, etc., proved unfortunate.

Men are not given to reward the giver of information which leads to the loss of their money. And, therefore, this latter industry, let him cultivate it never so sedulously, brought little grist to Mr. Prance's mill. But April had brought a change in his fortunes; he was walking gloomily up the Strand, when he suddenly ran across a bookmaker with whom he had done business in more prosperous days. The thought struck him; he stopped him, and exclaimed, "Mr. Black, give a poor devil, who is clean broke, a chance."

"Well, you do look 'dead stony,' and that's a fact," rejoined the bookmaker. "What is it you want?"

"Give me a tip, and a trifle to back it. I can't pick a winner myself nohow."

"Well," replied Mr. Black, "there's half a sovereign for you. As for the tip, remember, I don't know much about it, but I advise you to put it on Belisarius for the Two Thousand. You'll get something like twelve or fourteen to one; at least, they were laying hundreds to sevens an hour ago in there," and Mr. Black jerked his thumb in the direction of the Victoria Club.

How Belisarius won the Two Thousand we already know, and it is almost needless to say that Sam Prance profited a little thereby. From that out he haunted the neighbourhood of Wellington Street in the hopes of once more coming across that good-natured bookmaker. It was some days before he succeeded in doing that: though, thanks to the few sovereigns he had won over the Two Thousand, he was now more respectably attired, yet he had not the audacity to call at the club and ask for Mr. Black. When you have been half-starved and half-frozen through a long winter you do not recover your assurance all at once. Prance had been so utterly brow-beaten in his misery that he had not as yet thoroughly recovered his nerve, and shrank from meeting a rebuff. However, his patient vigilance was at last rewarded, and he once more encountered Mr. Black. He of course stopped him to thank him for the turn he had done him, and wound up by asking him whether he fancied Belisarius for the Derby,

"No," rejoined the bookmaker, "I don't. I know no more now than I did last time. I am guided entirely by the money-market. On his Newmarket performance he ought to be a much hotter favourite than he is. What they are going on I don't know, but there are certain men, who seldom make a mistake, seem to have the amount of the National Debt to lay against Belisarius. That's all I know about it, Prance, and I should not be at all surprised to see Belisarius go back in the betting at the last. If he don't, it will be a very warm Monday indeed for two or three of them."

Sam Prance, as he walked away, cogitated deeply upon how he might best turn Mr. Black's hint to his profit. He had neither capital nor credit to make much of laying against Belisarius, and certainly, after what he had heard, had no wish to back him. It occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to carry the news to Major Kynaston.

The Major would understand how to make the most of such intelligence as well as any man, and he knew from past experience that when his patron won a good stake he was liberal to any of his dependents who conduced to the result. He had recommended Kynaston to back Belisarius for The Guineas, and found it quite as profitable as backing it himself.

"The hint has proved well worth paying for, Sam," the Major had said to him upon that occasion. "I told you last summer to keep a sharp look-out as to whether they had a good two-year-old in the North. You got hold of him a little late—we ought to have been on at double the odds."

But when Mr. Prance made his appearance in Mayfair, and communicated his new intelligence, Dick Kynaston exclaimed:—

"If you're sure of what you say there is more money in this than there was in the other; but look here, Sam, there must be no mistake about it. One reason I have stood to you rather is that whatever your information might be you have always told me exactly where you got it, and I could depend upon its accuracy; now, no nonsense, tell me the

precise grounds you have for saying Belisarius won't win the Derby."

Prance, in reply, detailed his conversation with the book-maker, winding up with "And, as you know, sir, the tip about Belisarius for The Guineas came from the same man."

"Yes," observed the Major, meditatively, "I know Black; he's as shrewd and close an observer as there is in the Ring. I'll just watch this little game for a few days myself, and, when I have noted who are the colt's most persistent opponents, shall quite know what to think of it. That'll do for the present, Sam. You're not given to running riot, and I need scarcely hint this is nothing to give tongue about."

"Never fear, Major, I'm not given to talk unless I am paid for it."

"Oh! one thing more," exclaimed Kynaston, "if you happen to hear what it is the opponents of the favourite are going on, let me know."

"Certainly, sir," replied Prance, as he picked up his hat, "if I can make out anything more you shall know it at once. For the present, good-bye, Major."

As Prance walked away from the Kynastons' house, an angry flush came over his face at the sight of Mr. Furzedon leisurely lounging along on the other side of the street. Furzedon was apparently quite unconscious of his presence, and, after he had got past him some little distance, Prance turned round mechanically to glare once more at his enemy. He was not a little surprised to see Furzedon cross the street and knock at the Kynastons' door.

"I didn't know," he muttered, "that he was thick with the Major, and, if they are not pretty intimate, how the deuce comes it that he is dropping in at this time of the morning?"

Mr. Prance was not much versed in social etiquette, but he did know that a morning call signified either business or considerable intimacy, and to ascertain what were the relations between Kynaston and Furzedon became now a problem which it behoved him to study.

XXIII.—CHARLIE'S SUMMONED TO TOWN.

THE hunting is long a thing of the past, the sap runs riotously through the trees, which are breaking forth in all the glorious verdure of the month of May. Birds are singing, buds are bursting, and grass is springing in every direction. The song of the throstle from the topmost bough re-echoes to chanticleer's shrill defiance, as the sun breaks forth in the early morning to kiss the white-and-pink fragrant blossoms characteristic of the merry month. Few girls had ever enjoyed the springtime more than Lettice Devereux: but somehow this year the salt seemed to have lost its savour. It struck her that North Leach was a little dull. The Kynastons had left The Firs; Charlie was away soldiering; as for John, he seemed more absorbed in the farms than usual. Lettie did not understand it; she no longer took the interest in the young horses that she used to do; how the game-fowls were doing became a matter of indifference to her; and the garden had ceased to be an attraction. She was restless and discontented; she had as yet received no invitation from Mrs. Connop, and Lettie had reckoned more upon it than she had ever done hitherto. Charlie, too, was so stupid; he wrote so seldom, and when he did his letters were so dreadfully egotistical, he never said anything about the people he mixed with, nor told her anything about his brother officers. Of course his letters would be so much more interesting if they contained some information regarding his associates. As for coming to North Leach, he only alluded to that as a possibility of next winter; and in the meantime Lettice recognized that there was a monotony and solitude about North Leach hard to bear.

She took her solitary rides, she strove honestly to busy herself with her accustomed avocations; but, in spite of all that, there were times when she felt that the stagnation of life at North Leach was well-nigh insupportable. As for Gilbert Slade, she would trouble her mind no more about him. Mrs. Kynaston was right—if he had cared ever so little about her he would have made an effort to see

her before this. But Gilbert Slade had made never a sign, and might as well have been shooting big game in India as quartered at York for all she heard of him. Mr. Furzedon, on the contrary, had twice, under some rather flimsy pretext, visited them for two or three days. Plausible though his account had been of how he had happened to be in their neighbourhood, there was a ring of untruth about it which gave Miss Devereux the idea that Mrs. Kynaston was right, and that she herself was the attraction that drew him into North Lincolnshire. Lettice, moreover, could but see that, without venturing to proclaim himself an admirer, he paid her considerable attention, and with no undue vanity felt that he only wanted a little encouragement on her part to become a recognized pretender to her hand.

Still, Lettie had by no means got over her prejudice against him. She was courteous, pleasant to him, and did her best to make his brief visits to North Leach agreeable; but, for all that, she did not care about him herself. To say that she disliked him would be too strong a phrase, but she was certainly indifferent to him, and, bravely though she tried to master it, was conscious of an ungrounded prejudice against him. It was probably the ingrained cynicism of Furzedon's character that jarred upon Miss Devereux. He strove very hard to subdue it; he was aware that that vein is rarely popular with women; but nature combined with habit is not easily smothered, and, in spite of all his care, his bitter views of men and things would occasionally escape his lips. Still Ralph Furzedon thought that he was making fair progress; and had he not clever Mrs. Kynaston to aid him? and did he not hold that tremendous card of Charlie's difficulties to launch whenever he thought fittest? Ralph Furzedon little thought as he left North Leach, in the very first days of May, how speedily Mrs. Kynaston would counsel an application of the screw.

But, if Charlie Devereux could find no time to go to North Leach, he could manage to get a week's leave for the purpose of running up to London. And hither he had betaken himself in obedience to the express wish of Mrs.

Kynaston. She and Charlie corresponded pretty frequently—a correspondence which they did not think it necessary to mention to other people. Even at The Firs Kate could often have given Lettie Devereux later news of her brother than she herself possessed ; but Mrs. Kynaston never thought fit to mention it. She was a lady much given to philandering correspondence, and usually had two or three what she denominated “special friends” of the male sex, with whom she kept up much sentimental letter-writing. No very great harm, perhaps, in the epistles ; and yet they always contained a certain amount of love-making, such as were hardly befitting a married woman to receive. A prompt, energetic woman, as well as a capricious one, was Mrs. Kynaston, accustomed to subdue men easily. Her first feeling on discovering Gilbert Slade’s insensibility to her fascinations had been astonishment, then came pique, and finally she had framed herself into a mad passion for this Dragoon, who declined to put his neck beneath her foot.

But Mrs. Kynaston was not easily beaten when she had set her mind upon a thing. She had determined that the first thing it behoved her to put an end to was Slade’s growing admiration for Lettie Devereux. Secondly, to marry that young lady to Furzedon as soon as she could compass it. Most women would have deemed these two things beyond their power to bring about, but Mrs. Kynaston had implicit reliance in her own abilities, and was wonderfully adroit in making the most of such weapons as came to her hand. Already she had put into Furzedon’s head the idea that Lettie would make him an excellent wife. Already she had implanted in Miss Devereux’s breast mistrust of Bertie Slade’s intentions, that it was the sort of conventional flirtation these soldiers always thought proper to indulge in with any pretty girl they came across. But she wanted to do more than that, she wanted to effectually sever Lettie from her lover. It was in furtherance of these purposes that she had urged Charlie to run up to town ; “she had so many things to say to him,” she wrote. “She wanted to see him now he had had a few months’ military training, whether he was improved or the reverse ;

she hoped they hadn't spoiled his seat in the riding-school ; in short, Charlie," she concluded, "I must see you ; I'm sure you can get a few days' leave now, so, remember, I shall take no excuse from you."

However indifferently Charlie might have regarded Mrs. Kynaston's charms upon first making her acquaintance he could no longer be accused of that indifference now. He was no doubt very much in love with as thorough-going a flirt as there was in all London, and he lost no time in obeying her behest. He was in all the flush of his Two Thousand winnings, and sanguine, as young gentlemen of his age are wont to be, about being equally fortunate over the Derby. That he should present Mrs. Kynaston with a very pretty bangle as a memento of Belisarius, and tell her the whole story of how he came to back that horse, and of all that he hoped from his success at Epsom, one need scarcely say. Mrs. Kynaston was interested in his story ; she led him on till at last she drew from him the whole story of his difficulties ; how that he had come to terrible grief in plunging at the Houghton meeting at Newmarket the year before last ; how that Furzedon in the first instance had lent him the money ; how he felt the obligation of being indebted to a friend so oppressive that he had taken counsel with Major Kynaston on the subject ; and how that the Major had borrowed the money for him elsewhere.

"And at usurious interest, no doubt," interposed the lady. "Dick, I know from sad experience, is an adept at such things ; but," she continued, with a grave shake of her head, "my poor Charlie, you have to pay for it. How is it all to end ?" And then he told her how he looked forward to his winnings on the Derby to discharge all his liabilities ; and how that, when he had wiped the slate clean, he would take very good care not to make such a fool of himself again.

Mrs. Kynaston made no further comment upon his story, but lightly changed the conversation.

"And so you have seen nothing of any of your people since you left North Leach the very end of last year ?"

Charlie shook his head.

"No; foolish of me, of course. I know from your letters you have not. What I mean is, Have you no news to tell me from North Leach?"

"No," replied young Devereux; "it is too early to know much about the game; too early to know much about the crops. Lettice says she finds it very dull, and is looking anxiously forward to an invitation from her aunt; but so far, I believe, it hasn't arrived."

"Ah! that is not exactly what I call news. Lettice did not tell you, for instance, she was going to be married—did she?"

"Lettice married! No. Who to?"

"My dear Charlie, brothers are always notoriously blind to their sisters' love affairs; but still, I should have thought you might have seen how very attentive your friend Mr. Furzedon was to Lettice last season."

"You forget," he replied, "that I was only altogether a very few days in town last year; and, to tell you the truth, I had an idea that there might be something of that sort between her and Gilbert Slade."

"Ah! You think, because at Lettie's request he assisted you to get a nomination for a commission, he was in love with your sister—a natural mistake, but I should doubt Mr. Slade being in a position to marry even if I thought him a marrying man."

"Well, he came all the way down to Lincoln to see Pole Star win last autumn, and I thought perhaps that the seeing of Lettie —"

"Oh, yes; I know," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston, with some little acerbity; "he sat in her pocket all day, and had hardly a word to bestow upon any one else; but that's only the way of your precious profession. Still, I don't wonder that you were a little puzzled."

"You give me credit for noticing a great deal more than I did upon that occasion. Remember, that was the day I won my first steeplechase. I had the race and Pole Star on my mind the whole afternoon; and, beyond that, Gilbert shook hands with me and congratulated me on my victory. I know no more. How he and Lettie passed their time I've no idea."

"Then you don't know that Mr. Furzedon has been at North Leach twice this Spring?"

"Well, I'm not sure," rejoined Charlie, "that Lettie did not say something about it in one of her letters; but it made so little impression that I had forgotten it."

"Well, I can't say positively," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston; "the two principals have neither of them thought fit to make confession to me, but that Mr. Furzedon adores your sister I know from his own lips (a little exaggeration this); and as for Lettie, well, she knows it, and if she disapproved it how came Mr. Furzedon to go down to North Leach *twice*?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Charlie, "I never dreamt of his caring about Lettie in that way—he's not a bad fellow Furzedon, but I don't think I quite care about him as a brother-in-law."

Charlie Devereux's vision had been a little enlarged since he had joined the ——th Hussars; he probably drew a more correct estimate of his fellows than when he was an undergraduate, and was conscious now that his comrades would pronounce Furzedon not quite "the right thing."

"Don't be foolish, Charlie," replied Mrs. Kynaston, "your sister is doing very well for herself. Ralph Furzedon is a very rising young man, much richer, I have some reason to know, than he is usually supposed. A shrewd man too, not a genius—they, poor things, rarely get on in this life—but a clear-headed, practical man. Ralph Furzedon will push his way in this world, he will get into Parliament, and has, no doubt about it, a future before him. Lettie, like any prudent girl, knows which side her bread is buttered, and is not likely to throw on one side a good *parti* for poetical visions of love or perchance strawberry-leaves."

"You know best," said young Devereux, "and I suppose Lettie is doing a good thing for herself. Furzedon has always been a pal of mine, but for all that, let him be as rich as may be, I wish he were not going to marry my sister."

"You foolish boy," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, "you are confusing love and settling in life; it is given to few of us

to marry the man we really care for. Oh dear! how little giving in marriage there would be if *that* was an essential part of it." And then Kate Kynaston plunged into one of those charming little dissertations in which she was such a proficient, in which she demonstrated that it was the duty or three-fourths of womankind to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families, and that it was their misfortune to come across those they could have loved later on in life; they were less to be blamed than wept over. What the sacrifice had been in her own case was left most misty and undefined, but Mrs. Kynaston always contrived to send her admirers away with the idea that she was a woman wrestling with a heavy burden, that her hearer was the one man that had ever touched her heart, and that, had they met earlier, life would have been so very different.

As for Charlie, he went back to York uncomfortable about Lettice's engagement, and with a hazy idea that he had added to poor Mrs. Kynaston's troubles by his own fatal fascinations, and yet a less conceited man than Charlie Devereux probably never trod shoe-leather.

"Well, young 'un," exclaimed Gilbert Slade, as Charlie burst into his quarters a few minutes before the trumpet sounded for dress—"had a good time? Whom did you see, and what have you been doing? You didn't forget to call upon my Uncle Bob, did you?"

"No," rejoined Charlie, "I called twice on him, but I didn't see him. I was most anxious to thank him for all he had done for me, but the porter said he had not been at the Thermopolium for three or four days, and he thought that he must be out of town."

"Pick up any news?" inquired Bertie, lazily.

"I did," rejoined Charlie. "I saw Mrs. Kynaston, and heard a very strange bit of news from her; rather a queer thing," continued Charlie, "to hear of your own sister going to be married from any one but herself, but I did. She told me that Lettice was engaged to be married."

"What!" exclaimed Gilbert Slade, springing to his feet. "Miss Devereux going to be married? Nonsense, Charlie. Who to?"

"To Ralph Furzedon, of all people in the world," replied young Devereux

"What, that cad!" exclaimed Bertie. "Well, I'm d—d. No, I beg your pardon, Charlie, of course I don't mean that. I mean I congratulate you, old fellow. I trust Miss Devereux will be happy. Pray forgive me that slip of the tongue, and consider I've said all the proper things usual under the circumstances."

Charlie said no more, but, as he walked away to his own quarters to dress, felt less reconciled than ever to this engagement of his sister. Bertie's involuntary exclamation had strengthened his own conviction. Stripped of his fine feathers Furzedon *was a cad*. Could Mrs. Kynaston be right, and was Lettice really engaged to this man?

"Ah," he muttered, "women are so much clearer sighted than ourselves in these matters. It is little likely that a clever woman like Kate,"—and his face slightly flushed as he murmured her Christian name—"would make a mistake in such a matter."

XXIV.—SAM PRANCE AT HOME.

MAJOR KYNASTON had been not a little puzzled at Sam Prance's reference to young Devereux last year; he had wondered then whether Prance had the slightest idea that there were business relations between himself and Furzedon. They had now several Turf transactions in common, and moreover, Furzedon, as the young man about town, when he had the chance, invariably brought young gentlemen in difficulties to the Major for advice. He would observe with a geniality which sat ill upon him, on becoming the confidant of such troubles, "Let me introduce you to Dick Kynaston, he'll pull you through. He knows all these sort of fellows, and can always tell you what to do, and who to go to." And then Mr. Furzedon would chuckle to himself at what was to him an exquisite jest, to wit, that these young innocents would shortly be brought round to his pen to be shorn;

and that Kynaston was in complete ignorance that he, Furzedon, was in reality the shearer.

Kynaston had not seen Prance for some months after their interview, and had pretty well dismissed the subject from his mind; he thought it was impossible that Prance could know anything more of his connection with Furzedon than that they were to some extent Turf confederates. Still, when the succeeding spring in London Prance once more made his appearance at the little house in Mayfair, the Major reverted to the subject. But he soon found that the tout knew little more than that Furzedon and himself were acquainted; that he had small knowledge of the Devereuxes; and that his main motive was a rabid hostility and distrust of Ralph Furzedon. Prance had indeed no particular object in rescuing Charlie Devereux from Furzedon's clutches other than the hatred he bore the latter, and, although he considered his patron well able to take care of himself, yet he thought it was better to give him an insight into Furzedon's real character. Dick Kynaston had taken due note of the caution, and said to himself, "I've had to do with some queer customers in my time, but it is always a great advantage to know when you 'sit down to play with Ah Sin!'" This had been all Prance had intended by his warning, and he had thought no more of the matter until he saw Furzedon call at the house in Mayfair just after he had left it.

But now all Prance's curiosity was aroused. Two strong passions urged him on to discover what was the connection between the two men—his enmity to Furzedon and his gratitude to Kynaston. Blunted and seared as all his better feelings were, he still held a dogged fidelity towards the Major. He had always been liberal to him, and the unfortunate man felt very grateful to him for the assistance he had rendered in the bitter need of last winter. Still Mr. Prance, as he sits alone in his modest apartment in Great Coram Street, does not exactly see his way to arriving at what he wants.

"What can have brought these two men together?" and as he turns this knotty point over in his mind the man puffs vigorously at his short clay pipe. Sam Prance's

domicile was by no means luxuriously furnished, A bed ; a washstand ; a chair, by courtesy called easy ; and a table or two, comprised its contents, but it was clean, and the proprietor regarded it as princely compared to some of the lodgings he had flitted in and out of during the past few months. One of the tables was littered with a few old turf guides, a blotting-pad, pens, ink, and paper, and at length, by way of penetrating the mystery, Prance sat himself down, and, taking up his pen, determined to, what he called, "Run off Ralph Furzedon's performances," as he would have gone through those of a racehorse with a view to getting a line through him of some other horse.

"Yes," he muttered, after scribbling fast for ten minutes or more, "it's a very nice sheet, it reads well, it's a pity his swell friends can't see it. His sire, a pawnbroker ; two-year-old performances: trafficking in the sale of unredeemed pledges ; backing horses on the turf ; making love to his friend's wife and urging that friend to neglect an honest occupation for gambling and horse-races ; pretty well that for a young 'un who had not reached his eighteenth year. Three-year-old performances: laughing at his friend when he was kicked out of his situation ; mocking at him and remarking it was his own own fault when his wife ran away ; refusing him assistance when he was in difficulties ; gibing at him ; and, finally, knocking him down because, in his extremity, he asked him in pity's sake for a sovereign."

There was no doubt a basis of truth underlying Prance's summary, but the man's morbid antipathy to Furzedon must be allowed for ; the colouring was more bold and vivid than the facts warranted ; and that Prance should attribute every evil that had befallen him to Furzedon's malign influence must be taken very much *cum grano salis*. He had contributed a fair share himself to his own undoing ; and the defalcations which cost him his situation and blasted his character were in nowise due to any suggestion of Ralph Furzedon. However, painting his enemy in the darkest tints did not serve to elucidate the problem he had sat down to consider. That the Major was fond of a game of cards he thought was likely ; that the Major

preferred winning to losing had no doubt, he never knew anybody who did not. That the Major was capable of assisting fortune he deemed probable, and thought none the worse of him for that. In his own easy code of morality he regarded cheating and all games of chance as cleverness; and he was the best player who concealed most cards up his sleeve without detection. Horse-racing the same, he saw no harm in a robbery, provided you were in it; it was a rascally thing if you were not; and, if publicly discovered, there was always the chance of your paying the penalties, and not being paid the money. But then there it was again; clever people were not discovered, it was the bunglers that were found out. Now, whatever Furzedon had done—and remember, there was no enormity of this sort that Prance believed he had not committed—he had never been found out. Surely Major Kynaston could not have fallen into the mistake that this was a young gentleman from whom there was money to be won. No, no; the Major was far too 'cute not to have found out for himself long ago that there was nobody about better able to take care of his money than Mr. Furzedon. What could be the link that bound the two men? Nothing but chance is likely to throw light upon one face of their connection; but of their confederacy on the Turf it would be odd if Mr. Prance is not speedily acquainted with; and when that comes to pass there will be slight doubt of Sam unbosoming himself. Of such partnership he will feel certain that his patron must eventually get the worst.

“Because he is young,” muttered Mr. Prance to himself, even now in all ignorance of the facts, “the Major thinks he is green. He little guesses he is dealing with the foxiest devil he ever met; who makes capital out of his youth and inexperience. The Major is wary, up to trap, no doubt; thinks, I dare say, that he is not to be had by any one alive. It's a queer world, and it seems a farce to suppose that, sitting here in a room like this, my experience can be good for much; but, for all that, I've learnt this, that the biggest sharper in a skittle-alley is generally the young and innocent-looking yokel. I must get to the

bottom of this; for cleaned out by such a robber as Furzedon I'm blessed if I see the Major."

Dick Kynaston was in no very great danger; he was much too wise not to have taken a pretty accurate estimate of his new partner by this time; he was quite aware that, young though he might be, Furzedon was already considerably more rook than pigeon; and, whatever his original intention might have been, had thoroughly abandoned any idea of a snatch at his quill-feathers. The revelation that Furzedon was practically Jordan & Co. would certainly have surprised him, but would have made very little other difference to him, save in one respect; it mattered little to the Major to what money-lenders he took his young friends, his profits in the transaction were pretty much the same in any case. But Dick Kynaston had been born, and, however shady his avocation might now be, still clung to the status of, a gentleman. He was ready to interview the money-lender in his own den, but, let him once recognize that Furzedon was numbered of the usurers, and the Major would take good care that he never crossed the threshold of Mrs. Kynaston's drawing-room again.

Although Sam Prance was not aware, as yet, that Furzedon had inherited and taken up his uncle's business, it stands to reason that his old connection with the pawn-broking business might throw that knowledge in his way at any moment. Should anything prompt him to inquire, it would, of course, be as easy as possible for him to ascertain who was really at the present moment Jordan & Co. His former apprenticeship had taught him the freemasonry of the trade; and what that means we all know, let the trade or profession be what it may.

Revenge upon Furzedon was interwoven into Sam Prance's very being. It might slumber for a time, but it never died. He would brood, in his morbid way, over all the misery that man had cost him till he wound himself up to that state of mind in which men contemplate taking the life of their fellows. But Prance had considerable regard for his own neck, an apprehension more preservative of life than it usually gets credit for. To say that he had **hardly** the tigerish temperament of which murderers are

composed would be absurd. Murderers seem composed of every possible fibre, from the ruffian who slays his fellow from sheer brutality down to the cringing reptile who does away with his foe simply from terror. No; Mr. Prance in his solitary musings had often muttered to himself with passionate execrations, "How I should like to kill him!" But he had never seriously contemplated anything of the kind. He would have liked to drag Furzedon down to his own level, but of that he felt there was small prospect. His foe was wealthy, and a man likely to keep a strong hand on his gear, let it be well gotten or ill. There was little likelihood of his being able to menace Furzedon's ruin in that wise. In one way only did Mr. Prance see an opportunity of gratifying his hatred, and that was in socially exposing him. He did not quite know as yet even how that was to be brought about, but he was conscious that he knew a good many shady transactions of Furzedon's, and he had little doubt that eventually others would come to his knowledge if he only kept ceaseless watch upon his quondam friend. Not such transactions as would place Mr. Furzedon within reach of the law—Prance considered him too cunning for that; but it might be in his power to proclaim to the world things that would cause Ralph Furzedon's swell acquaintances to turn their backs upon him. And Prance had somehow divined his enemy's weakness in this respect.

It was so. A desire to rub shoulders with the *haut monde* was the aim of Ralph Furzedon's life. With this object he had gone to the University. The furtherance of this design had a good deal to say to his going on the Turf. It was something to know a Lord, if it was only on a racecourse; to pass the time-of-day to a real swell, even if it was at Tattersall's. Furzedon had tact, was pachydermatous, and, though pushing, not obtrusively so. He did not force an acquaintance, but he wriggled into one with all the sinuous twistings of an eel. Men found themselves gradually committed to a bowing recognition with Ralph Furzedon, while at the same time they wondered how the deuce they came to know him. Instinct had told Prance how to strike his enemy; it wanted only that

fortune or his own exertions should give the weapons to his hand. Furzedon too, and with some reason, flattered himself that he was making his way slowly but surely in the path he had marked out, and should Mr. Prance ever compass his projected *exposé* he will have the satisfaction of knowing that he could have dealt his adversary no bitterer blow.

As for Ralph Furzedon he was very well contented with the way things were going with him. Most especially was he well pleased with his new allies the Kynastons. The Major promised to prove profitable to him all round. It was from him that the inspiration came concerning Belisarius for the Two Thousand, and Furzedon had won a very nice little stake over that race; then, as for Mrs. Kynaston, she looked like being of much value to him from a social point of view. She had procured him invitations in more than one direction that he coveted, and, cunning and suspicious as he was by nature, he placed unlimited reliance on Mrs. Kynaston's advice concerning this unknown country which he was now entering. It was at her instigation that he had determined to woo Lettice Devereux, and he had resolved to be guided by her advice in every stage of the matter. It must be observed in Kate Kynaston's defence that she knew nothing of Furzedon's antecedents, and believed him to be no more than a racing confederate of her husband's. In spite of that indescribable something about him which, as before said, was apt to produce inquiry concerning his forbears—a point which none of Furzedon's acquaintance had as yet succeeded in penetrating—Mrs. Kynaston regarded him as by no means an ineligible match. He was young, tolerably good-looking—those who admire the Semitic type in man would say very—and undoubtedly well-off. If Lettice Devereux could make up her mind to fancy him she might consider herself well married. There was, of course, the possibility that she might do better; but it is safer to gather the apple within our reach than to set our affections upon those on the topmost bough.

And so Mrs. Kynaston went to work to bring about a match between these two with a clear conscience.

XXV.—KATE KYNASTON RECONNOITRES.

“WELL, Mr. Furzedon, when am I to congratulate you?” exclaimed Mrs. Kynaston, as she welcomed that gentleman to her pretty little drawing-room. “Am I to do so to-day? Am I to congratulate you on having stormed the citadel, or to chide you for your want of enterprise in still delaying the final assault?”

“It’s all very well,” replied Furzedon; “but it is possible to speak prematurely in these cases. I don’t feel quite sure of my ground with Miss Devereux.”

“Surely you made her understand that you’re paying your addresses to her?” replied Mrs. Kynaston.

“Oh, yes; I don’t think there could be any possible mistake about that, but I can’t say that I get much encouragement. She is polite enough, and all that, but you know what I mean, she don’t encourage me to open my heart.”

“Dear me, what has that got to do with it in these days? Don’t you know that the basis of matrimonial arrangements in these times is—are you able and willing to open your pockets? Don’t be faint-hearted, a girl can’t say you ‘No’ till you have asked her the question, and, if she does, tell her you won’t take that for an answer; a little dash and resolution and you will be engaged to Lettie Devereux before the season’s over, and a very sweet, pretty, lady-like wife she will make you.”

“I wish I quite thought so,” rejoined Furzedon; “but her manner rather gives me warning to go no further than I have done.”

“Never fear to put your fortune to the test,” rejoined Mrs. Kynaston gaily, “and don’t take thrice ‘No’ for an answer. I have got a hint to give you: Charlie Devereux is in grievous difficulties, and trusting to his Derby book to pull him through them. It never does, you know. He is sure, poor boy, to be in worse trouble than ever after the race. Now, there’s an opening for you. A few hundreds is not much object to you, if you are in earnest about this thing. Save your friend from the results of his folly—you

enlist him at once on your side; and as for Lettice, she can hardly refuse to listen to her brother's benefactor."

"How did you learn all this?" exclaimed Furzedon, eagerly.

"From Charlie himself," replied Kate Kynaston. "He was up in town for two or three days last week, and told me if Belisarius didn't get him out of the scrape there was nothing for it but a full confession to his father."

"He told you this?" said Furzedon, as his quick brain rapidly turned over the chances of the situation.

"Yes," he continued at length, "that would give me an opportunity. I am not given to throwing my money away much, but you are quite right. I should have a *quid pro quo* in this case, and I would willingly risk a few hundreds to make Miss Devereux my wife. Is she likely to be in town soon?"

"That's just what I can't make out, but I mean knowing this afternoon. She is dying to come, but that tiresome old aunt of hers hasn't written as yet; however, I'm going out to see her to-day, and if she has not sent that invitation I fancy she will after I've had a talk with her."

"You won't mention my hopes to Mrs. Connop?" said Furzedon, a little anxiously.

"No," responded Mrs. Kynaston, with a somewhat queer expression on her face, "I shall not. I don't think you are quite the nephew that old woman would be disposed to welcome; she is a foolish, romantic old thing, and has, I suspect, nursed the idea of marrying Lettie to Mr. Slade."

"Not quite so foolish, my dear Mrs. Kynaston, as you think," rejoined Furzedon, as he rose to take his departure; "I've a strong idea that those two were very good friends before they parted last year."

"That matters little," replied the lady, coolly; "Mr. Slade is in no position to marry, and any slight flirtation there might have been between them is not a thing worth your consideration. Good-bye; don't forget my advice; ask Lettie Devereux to be your wife the first time you have an opportunity, and, should she say 'No'—which I don't believe she will,—well, ask her ~~again~~ **when she has had a few weeks to think about it.**"

Mr. Furzedon said no more, but bade his hostess adieu, and walked leisurely back to his own rooms, pondering deeply on the advice that had been given him.

Interested though her motives might be, Mrs. Kynaston could hardly be accused of not working energetically to bring about the marriage she had planned. It had become essential for her purpose that Miss Devereux should now make her appearance in town, and she drove off that afternoon to call upon Mrs. Connop, and ascertain when Lettie might be expected. She found that lady at home and very full of grievances; to begin with, she was suffering from a severe cold, and that as a rule may be pronounced quite sufficient grievance without going into any others that may possibly affect our friends; moreover, she had been compelled, from some cause or other, to have the workmen into the house; and what Londoner, that has had experience of him, does not know what a terrible old man of the sea is the British workman when he once gets within your gates?

"I hope," said Mrs. Connop, "it has never been your lot to know what having the work-people in means. The British workman has been often abused and deserves every bit of it. He breaks my rest with hideous regularity. He dawdles about all day; shows great capacity for beer; is profuse in assurances that he shall have finished the job by the end of the week. He looks at it, I suppose thinks over it, but he never works, and *he never goes.*"

"Ah! fortunately we have no experience of that sort of thing. We haven't a house of our own, but always rent one, and Dick would take very good care that there was no necessity for that during our tenancy, but I've always heard that the work-people are very trying. Do you expect Lettie to visit you this year? She was rather looking forward to it, I think, the last time I saw her."

"And I am always very glad to have her with me," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "but it's impossible while the house is in such a muddle as it is now. If I had had an idea what it was going to be I'd have slipped down to Brighton for a month, and got out of the way of it all. But they assured me it would take less than a week, and I was

foolish enough to believe them. However, they vow that it really is very nearly finished now, and, forsworn as they have often proved themselves, I try to believe them this time. I shall write for Lettie as soon as ever I am rid of them. How was she looking when you saw her last?"

"Oh! she was well enough when we left The Firs, but she finds North Leach rather dull now the hunting is over. She gets a glimpse of the world with you; and, as is only natural, she longs for the fun and gaiety of London in preference to the monotony of her life in the Wolds; besides, she made rather a sensation last year—she had quite a train of admirers."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "she is pretty, and she was no doubt popular, and got on well at all the dances I took her to. But Mr. Slade was the only pronounced admirer that I saw. He, I think, was a good deal struck with her."

"Oh! she had others besides him, and more profitable ones to boot."

"I like Mr. Slade," replied Mrs. Connop, sharply.

"I think most people do," said Kate; "he is very good-looking and a most agreeable cavalier. I was only speaking from a matrimonial point of view; but, from what I hear about him, Mr. Slade is in no position to take unto him a wife at present."

"Lettie has plenty of time before her to think about that."

"No doubt," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston. "But it is a thing that naturally crosses a girl's mind as soon as she is introduced. Mr. Furzedon, I should say, was quite as much struck with Lettie as Mr. Slade, and only wanted a little encouragement to declare himself."

"I don't like him as well as the other," said Mrs. Connop, sententiously.

"Perhaps not," replied Kate Kynaston; "but, when it comes to an eligible *parti*, Mr. Furzedon is preferable. He is a man very well off, and perfectly independent."

"Ah, well! as I said before, Lettie has no cause to hurry herself as yet."

"No, indeed," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, rising. "I am

so very glad to have been fortunate enough to get in. I trust your cold will soon be better, and that you will bring Lettie round to see me before many days are over. Do come, if it is only to show that you are delivered from this *incubus* that besets you. Good-bye." And as Mrs. Kynaston descended to her carriage she murmured, "Yes, my dear friend, I want these workmen out of the house quite as much as you do."

Furzedon, after duly thinking over Mrs. Kynaston's advice, and what she had told him about Charlie's difficulties, had fully made up his mind as to the plan of his campaign. Nobody knew the story of Charlie's difficulties better than he did; but it was news to him that young Devereux contemplated a "plunge" on Belisarius as a means of extrication from his embarrassments. He resolved he would boldly ask Lettice to marry him as soon as she appeared in London. He had a very tolerable share of self-esteem, but he hardly expected to be successful upon this occasion; if possible, he determined to avoid positive rejection, but to withdraw his pretensions discreetly as soon as he saw it imminent: then, only let Belisarius be beaten for the Derby, and he would make another attempt. Charlie would be then deeper in the mire than ever. And he might urge upon Miss Devereux that it lay with her to make it possible for him to pay his brother-in-law's debts.

Belisarius! He hadn't troubled his head much as yet to think about that colt's prospects for the Derby, but now it dawned upon him that as far as he was concerned the success of Belisarius would be inimical to his interests. He must make inquiries; the horse was not going very well in the market; he wondered whether there was anything wrong with him, he had had no hint of such a thing himself; perhaps Dick Kynaston might have heard something about it; he must ask him. Now it so happened that his visit to Mrs. Kynaston had been made the afternoon before Prance related to the Major what Mr. Black had told him; and when Prance espied Furzedon knocking at the Kynastons' door that gentleman was calling there expressly to learn what his Turf confederate thought of the

favourite's chance at Epsom, and was speedily put in possession of the Major's newly-acquired information.

"Wants inquiring into a bit, you know; but that fellow Black has the eye of a gled for the market and the nose of a bloodhound for a dead 'un. I should be very sorry to back a horse of which he held this opinion."

"Then," said Furzedon, "we had better lay against Belisarius this time, instead of backing him. It's safer as a rule, and at his present price there is a good bit of money to be made. Moreover, if Black is right, he will go back in the betting before the race, and there will be no difficulty about covering our money; besides, it jumps with my own inclinations; not that I'm such a fool as ever to be swayed by them in matters of business; but it's pleasant when they happen to run hand in hand. I've private reasons of my own for hoping Belisarius will not win."

"Would it be indiscreet," rejoined Kynaston, "to ask those reasons?"

"Very, Major," said Furzedon, laughing; "say I don't know how to pronounce his confounded name, dislike his colour, the cut of his tail—anything."

"That's settled, then," rejoined Kynaston; "if my inquiries are satisfactory, we decide to 'pepper the favourite,' to what extent depends upon what I hear."

"All right," replied the other, as he took his leave.

"There's no hurry, I think. I shall see you again in the course of a day or two."

Ralph Furzedon had not overlooked Prance in the street, although he had taken no notice of him; but he had not seen that he came out of the Kynastons' house, nor had he the slightest idea that the Major even knew of such a person in existence.

Suspicious by nature, had he known this he would have been at once on his guard. He was thoroughly aware of Prance's enmity, and knew, that, though the man could do him no positive harm, yet he could tell stories concerning him which he, Furzedon, would just as soon were buried in oblivion. He regarded Prance as innocuous simply because any disclosures he choose to make could only be made to that scum of the Turf with which he habitually

consorted. He was utterly unaware that in his character as tout Sam Prance was acquainted with many men like Kynaston who held a fair *status* in society.

To say that Gilbert Slade had been astonished at the news young Devereux had brought back from London would feebly express his feelings. He was thunderstruck, he had never thought of that, he barely knew Furzedon, had seen very little of him, and felt very indisposed to see more. He knew that he was intimate with the Devereuxes, had been at Cambridge with Charlie, had stayed at North Leach, and all that, but he never pictured him as a possible pretender to Lettice's hand. It might be said that he never pictured himself in that capacity; he had admired Miss Devereux very much, he thought her a very nice girl, would be delighted to meet her again, and was quite in earnest in accepting old Tom Devereux's invitation to North Leach.

It had been no fault of his the visit had not been paid. His answer to Charlie, when the latter suggested it, had been perfectly straightforward; he did not think the colonel was likely to look favourably upon an application for leave from the new recruit at present, unless he could advance some very serious cause for requiring it. He did not quite see his way into going to North Leach by himself, and so that visit had never been paid; but now that he heard Miss Devereux was engaged to be married to somebody else he discovered that his feelings towards her were very much stronger than admiration.

It was true that he had never thought of marrying her, but then he had never thought of marrying anybody. Marriage was a thing that had taken no definite shape in his mind—a ceremony that he might or might not go through in years to come. Even if he had ever contemplated it, he knew it was a thing that would be warmly opposed by, at all events, one of his relations. It was only the other day that his Uncle Bob, when joking him about Miss Devereux, had reminded him that he would give no consent to his marriage before he got his troop; and, although he was within very measurable distance of that longed-for piece of promotion, still there was no immediate

prospect of its taking place, and two or three years might elapse before he saw himself in the *Gazette*. He couldn't understand it; well, he supposed money was everything now-a-days; and yet he had thought Lettice not a girl of that sort either. He was not likely ever to be a man of more than moderate means himself; and, though he would probably inherit his Uncle Braddock's property eventually, yet, in the ordinary course of things, that was not likely to take place for many years. Well, if the thing was done, there was an end of it. Charlie was not likely to be misinformed on such a subject as this. However, they were both going up to London at the end of the month to see Belisarius win; Miss Devereux would, no doubt, be in town about that time. He would see her then, and judge for himself; he would, at all events, discover whether it was true that she was engaged to Furzedon.

XXVI.—FURZEDON PROPOSES.

“NO hap so hard but cometh to an end,” as the old poet sings.

The workmen are out of the house at last, the long-looked-for invitation has been despatched, and Lettie Devereux responds to it, has made her curtsey in Onslow Gardens—little knowing how anxiously her appearance in town was looked forward to by well-nigh half-a-dozen people. Her arrival was speedily notified to Mrs. Kynaston, and through her—directly or indirectly—Furzedon, Charlie, Slade, etc., were quickly aware that Miss Devereux was once more residing under the shelter of her aunt's wing. Animated was the conversation between Mrs. Kynaston and Furzedon when, upon receipt of the news, the latter called in to see the lady who was kind enough to manage the tangled skein of his love-affair.

“And you think I'm right, Mrs. Kynaston?” said Furzedon, at the close of the conference of some half-hour's duration. “You would strike at once?”

"Decidedly," rejoined the lady. "Your plan of action is admirable. Come to the point without loss of time. Back out of it if you find it going against you; say you will not venture to press for an answer as yet; that when Miss Devereux knows you better she will be perhaps better able to recognise your devotion. Pshaw! Any man out of his teens knows the whole gamut usually run up and down on these occasions. And, remember, you must not be disheartened by one rebuff. Lettice is country-bred, and the provincial mind does not expand quite so early as that of a London young lady. Still, I think she is rapidly awakening, and already understands the insipidity of life at North Leach."

"Thanks, very much," rejoined Furzedon. "I shall do precisely what you recommend; and, acting further on what you tell me, return to the charge should Belisarius lose the Derby; pleading that the help Charlie could accept from a brother-in-law he would feel compelled to decline from a friend. Wish me good luck, Mrs. Kynaston, and I will bid you good-day."

"All success to you," replied the lady; "don't be too abrupt this time; and should it not be successful—ah, well! I shall see you before it is judicious to deliver the second assault. It may not be necessary; but, should it be so, I will advise you once more. May good fortune attend you!"

When a man's feelings are deeply interested, the asking a woman to marry him is doubtless, if not a *mauvais quart d'heure*, at least a very nervous one; but in Furzedon's case it was not so. He admired Lettice Devereux, he liked Lettice Devereux, and Mrs. Kynaston had persuaded him that she would make him a good wife. He had made up his mind to marry her, and was very resolute to attain his end, but, as for saying he was in love with her, that was quite another thing; he would feel no despair in case of rejection; he would still sap steadily forward to attain his object as he would to attain any other object that he considered essential to his success in life; but, let him once be convinced that this thing was beyond his reach, and he was not likely to either break his heart about it or to display any great animosity to those who should thwart his purpose. At the present moment he would have sacrificed

ruthlessly any one who stood in his way; but, the game once given against him, he would trouble his head no further about his successful rival. A strong hater and vindictive man, when he took it into his head to feel aggrieved, but feeling no resentment towards those who got the best of him on any point, the thing once over.

Proposing with the expectation of being refused is, to borrow a phrase from the hunting-field, like "riding for a fall." It requires nerve, and is not exhilarating, but in both cases there must remain a feeling of much satisfaction when the thing is safely done with. Furzedon by no means liked the business before him; but he had made up his mind to do this thing, and do it he would. And in this frame of mind he wended his way to Onslow Gardens as soon as he heard of Miss Devereux's arrival there. If he could make the opportunity, he would ask the question without further delay. The knotty question that puzzled him on his way there was, how he was to get Mrs. Connop out of the way; and that at last he was fain to confess was beyond him. He repented now that he had not besought his confidante's aid; Mrs. Kynaston, he felt sure, could have managed that matter for him had he but asked her. Now he could only trust to the chapter of accidents. When he arrived at Onslow Gardens, he found both ladies in the drawing-room; and the thoroughly unembarrassed manner in which Lettie welcomed him would have convinced a far less shrewd man than Furzedon that, whatever her answer might be, her feelings would have very little to do with it. At all events, guided by Mrs. Kynaston's revelation and her own observation, Mrs. Connop came to the conclusion that Furzedon had no chance; "and," mused the old lady, "if he is fool enough to think so, the sooner that bit of nonsense is knocked out of his head the better." So, after a quarter of an hour's desultory conversation, she rose, and, under some frivolous pretext about finishing a letter, left the room, and gave Ralph Furzedon the opportunity he desired.

He had one point in his favour, and that was, that he was oppressed by no nervousness. He had got his chance, and determined to come to the point as quickly as possible,

"I have been most anxious to see you, Miss Devereux," he commenced.

"Very good of you to say so," replied Lettie. "You can't have been more anxious to see me than I have been to see London."

"I have got something to ask of you—a great favour to beg of you."

"Stop, Mr. Furzedon," interrupted the girl. "Remember, it is unwise to ask favours, unless you've good grounds for supposing they will be granted."

"I have very fair grounds for supposing that my request will be listened to, at all events. No man can lay claim to more. I am a great friend of your brother's; well known to all your people; well-to-do. I might go further, and say wealthy."

"It is quite unnecessary, Mr. Furzedon, to go through a catalogue of your social advantages," replied Lettie, with just a tinge of bitterness. She made no pretext of not understanding what her companion was driving at, but was a little nettled that he so persistently ignored the hint that she had given him. "To a friend of Charlie's," she continued, "I would grant any request that I had given him reasonable grounds for supposing I would say 'Yes' to."

"It is difficult for a man to interpret that phrase. We are not as quick as you to read what are reasonable grounds. Some of your sex—and they are those best worth winning—will give a man scant encouragement until he has put such request in formal words. It is natural. A sensitive girl is afraid of committing herself before a man has spoken."

"But if a girl has not only given the man no encouragement to speak, but has done her best to warn him that he is about to ask a foolish question—what then?"

He was clever to fence and fought his up-hill battle doggedly and with tact. "I think," he replied, gravely, "it should deserve better than to be called a foolish question. When a man lays his life and fortune at a woman's feet he is paying her the greatest compliment that lies within his power, at all events."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Furzedon," rejoined Lettie,

quickly. "I don't pretend to misunderstand you, but you must know this thing cannot be. I welcomed you as my brother's friend; I have given you no cause to suppose that I had any further feelings towards you. Let us remain friends, and forget that this conversation has ever taken place."

"I shall never forget it," he replied, brusquely; "and I refuse to take this for your final answer. I can wait, and trust to time and my devotion to plead for me; but as long as no one else has won your hand I shall ever be a pretender to it. I am answered for the present, and am not likely to intrude the subject upon you again for some time."

"I thank you for the compliment you have paid me," replied Lettie, with some little stateliness, and rising, "but, believe me, my answer is irrevocable."

Ralph Furzedon took the hint and his hat. "You will make my adieux to Mrs. Connop," he said, with a low bow; "and you won't object to say good-bye;" and as he spoke he extended his hand. Their palms crossed for a moment, and then Ralph Furzedon descended into the street, and began to reflect on the result of the battle.

"That's the end of the first round," he muttered, "to use the language of the prize-ring. Well! I expected to get the worst of it, and I did; but I can hardly be said to have been badly beaten. No; I don't think I threw a chance away. I am now a declared pretender to her hand. A rejected one, it is true. She can plead no ignorance of the state of the case for the future. Moreover, I have had resort to no subterfuges, but the very venial one of saying that she will hear no more of my request for some time. Should Belisarius be beaten at Epsom I shall most certainly have to urge the same request again, with the additional argument that a wealthy brother-in-law would represent the good genii that would assist Master Charlie out of his scrape. I only trust that he may still further complicate matters at Epsom. I'm not given to throwing money away, but I should not grudge a good round sum if it brought me Miss Devereux's hand."

It is characteristic of the contradictions of our nature

that Ralph Furzedon had never felt such admiration for Lettice as in the moment of his rejection. He was struck with her spirit, and at the same time the womanly way in which she strove to soften her refusal. He had wanted her for his wife; that was nothing. He thought she would further his ambition once placed in that position; but now, for the first time, the feeling of love was aroused within his breast, and he resolved that he would not resign his pretension to Lettie's hand as long as, by fair means or foul, he saw the slightest chance of winning it; and Furzedon was a man likely to put a very liberal construction on the old adage, "All's fair in love or war."

Mrs. Connop waited until she heard the front door close, and then at once descended to the drawing-room. She was not a little anxious to hear the result of the interview, and, not being given to beating about the bush, went straight to the point at once.

"Well, Lettie," she exclaimed, "what did you say to him? Pooh! child, there is no need to make any mystery about it. I know very well that Mr. Furzedon came down here to-day to ask you to marry him, and I went out of the room to give him a chance of doing so."

"Surely, aunt, you don't think that I ought to have said——"

"Ah! you've said 'No,' then. I thought you would. But, as I was told he was determined to ask the question, I thought the sooner it was over the better. Quite right, my dear. I like the other one best, ever so much."

"I don't understand you," rejoined Lettie, a little stiffly.

"Oh! yes, you do, and agree with me, also," retorted Mrs. Connop, laughing. "However, in the meantime, run up-stairs, and get your bonnet on; you will only have just time for a cup of tea before the carriage comes round."

Miss Devereux thought it wisest to close the discussion. She did not want to explain that Gilbert Slade had made no sign since last November, and that, though he had certainly given her cause to suppose he cared a good deal about her, he had not quite gone the length that justified the girl in calling him her lover. It was, indeed, rather a sore subject with Miss Devereux at present, and any

coupling of her name with Gilbert Slade she was sure to resent sharply.

Up in the North, meanwhile, expectation ran high. All Yorkshire was agog to see the big race of the South once more carried off by a north-country horse. The land of ham was on Belisarius to a man, and at the York Club the latest bulletin concerning Bill Smith's crack was eagerly promulgated and discussed. Some of the old hands, who had witnessed Bill Smith's career from his first race as a stable-boy to the triumphs of his zenith, and also been present at the mistakes of his later days, shook their heads and said, "Yes, the horse is doing splendidly no doubt—*how about the man?* You young gentlemen who back Belisarius will do well to remember that the jockey is more difficult to bring fit to the post than the horse."

To which the partisans of Belisarius rejoined, "Nonsense, we know Bill Smith's weakness, of course, but he's not a fool. He can take himself by the head when it is worth his while. He was all right at Newmarket, and you'll see he will be all right at Epsom."

Now, though this doubt was in the mouths of a good many people in his own country, yet the way he had ridden his horse in the Two Thousand had generally wiped out all misgivings concerning Bill Smith's sobriety in the South. It was believed that he had turned over a new leaf, and that the discovering himself to be the owner of such a flyer as Belisarius had worked a complete reformation in his character—at least for the present. This more sanguine view of the case was undoubtedly prevalent among the Turf circles in the metropolis, though shrewd observers, like Mr. Black, noted that there was a small knot of speculators who seemed unremitting in their hostility to Belisarius. Clever men too, and by no means given to bet foolishly; and, now that Dick Kynaston's attention had been called to it, he was speedily convinced of the truth of what Prance had told him. Very cautious and wary were these men, not to be beguiled into laying a longer price, but always prepared to show their disbelief in the Two Thousand winner whenever anybody offered to take half a point less than the odds. What they were going on the

Major did not know, and that was a riddle he was very anxious to arrive at.

Curiously, the first hint of the danger that threatened Belisarius came to Kynaston from his wife. "I got a letter from Charlie Devereux this morning," she remarked, as the Major looked into the drawing-room for a moment, previous to marching off to lunch at his club, "and he says that some of the old racing-men at York are rather incredulous about Bill Smith's riding a Derby winner once more. They say the horse is all right, but that the man cannot be trusted to keep from drinking; rather a bore should they prove right, for, as you know, I have backed him what for me is pretty stiffly; however, I don't suppose these old fossils know much about it. I am very sorry for Charlie," continued Mrs. Kynaston, "for as we know, Dick, when it comes to Turf matters, the 'old fossils' are apt to know a good deal more than young people who are just beginning to study them. Does this jockey, Smith, drink so?"

"Yes," rejoined the Major, "I begin to understand it now. That's why those fellows are so keen to lay against Belisarius. Bill Smith is one of the finest horsemen out, but he can't now-a-days be depended upon to keep sober," and with these words the Major left the room.

XXVII.—NEWS FROM BELLATON WOLD.

MAY crept on; it wanted just one fortnight to the Derby. The mails from the North conveyed a letter that morning of much interest to most of the characters in this narrative. It was addressed to Sir Ronald Radcliffe, Bart., and ran as follows:—

"DEAR RADCLIFFE,

"There is rarely smoke without fire, and the rumours that reached us from the North were by no means unfounded, although not so bad as reported. The horse never was better; but Bill, undoubtedly, has not alte-

gether stopped celebrating the Two Thousand victory. It was high time somebody came to look after him; and, as you know, he's not very tractable to deal with. Still, he will stand more from either you or me than any one else. I've got him well in hand now, and, though he is a good bit off a teetotaller, yet he will do no harm if I can only keep him where he is. I shall stay here for another week; and then, I am sorry to say, I am compelled to come back to London. Could you take my place here for the last few days? If we can only bring both to the post, all will be right; they'll take a deal of beating on Epsom Downs. Belisarius will strip a few pounds better horse than he did at Newmarket; and I like him better every time I see him gallop. If you possibly can come, do. It is a great *coup* to land, and we ought to throw no chance away in order to bring it about; and, though I've got Bill pretty straight at present, I don't like leaving him alone. However, if you can come, I'm sure you will.

“Yours always,

“NORMAN SLADE.”

Sir Ronald knit his brows when he received this letter. He saw clearly that, as a matter of common precaution, it behoved him to relieve Norman Slade at his post, but what was he to do? He had just been summoned to what promised to be the death-bed of an aunt from whom he had considerable expectations; a whimsical old woman, who indulged in periodical visitations of this nature; upon which occasions she was in the habit of summoning all her nearest relatives to the ceremony,—“a disappointing old woman,” as her graceless nephew called her, “who was always going, but never gone.” “If,” argued Sir Ronald, still knitting his brows over Slade's letter, “she did make a die of it this time, I dare say it would be all right; but if, after her manner, she comes round, she would cut me out of her will for what she would term my heartless ingratitude and want of affection for her. Hang it all! after humouring her tantrums all these years, it isn't wise to chance offending her now; it is like paying the premium on a life insurance and letting it drop just as it promised

to recoup one. Hang me if I know what to do. I stand to win a good stake on either event. In the case of Belisarius, I know exactly how much; in the case of my venerated aunt, I don't exactly. Which shall it be? Which is most risky: the will of a capricious old woman, or the success of a racer ridden by a jockey whose sobriety cannot be relied on? I've long odds in both cases; and, by Jove, I ought to have! for it would be hard to say which is the greatest toss-up. I am hard-up enough, heaven knows; and it is a case of which looks most lucrative, watching over the infirmities of my elderly relative, or watching over that peculiar weakness of Bill Smith's. It's a nuisance, a great nuisance; but I can't be in both places, and I think the Honourable Miss Shothouse has it: and I must trust to Bill Smith's eye to his own interest to keep him straight till all is over. Norman won't like it, nor do I; but it can't be helped, and I must write and tell him so."

Norman Slade was much disappointed at Sir Ronald's answer to his note. He stayed his appointed time, and saw Belisarius with the veteran jockey in the saddle do a rattling good gallop on the very morning of his departure. "It should come off, Bill," he exclaimed, as he said good-bye, "only take as much care of yourself as you do of the colt, and I think you'll beat 'em all at Epsom."

The opponents of the favourite were apparently well informed. Whether the knowledge that Norman Slade had left Bellaton Moor, and that Bill Smith was left there by himself, influenced their calculations it is impossible to say, but certain it is that the last few days before the race the horse became a slightly worse favourite in the market than he had been. It was in vain that the British public made him their champion, and put down their money. The ranks of the opposition daily gathered strength, and that most ominous sign of all to a veteran Turf-goer presented itself—to wit, that the more money Belisarius was backed for the worse favourite he became. Norman Slade noted this uneasily, and Sir Ronald, still dancing attendance upon his revered aunt, was equally conscious of the unpleasant phenomenon, but he could not get away, and

Miss Shothouse was displaying her accustomed vacillation on the subject of her departure. She showed all the procrastination of Charles II. without his politeness; and, as Sir Ronald said at the expiration of the second day, "the whole thing was a fraud," and that the Honourable Miss Shothouse would probably repeat this comedy a good half-dozen times before making her final bow to the public.

It was not till the Saturday before Epsom that the old lady would admit that the crisis was over, and that there was a fair expectation of her recovery. Sir Ronald waited no longer. He took an affectionate leave of his aunt, expressed the warmest satisfaction that she was still spared to them, and, with no little irritation simmering in his breast, took his way back to town. One of the first persons he sought on his arrival was Norman Slade.

"Very unlucky you couldn't go," observed that gentleman; "it would have been safer; my bulletins from Bellaton are excellent, that is to say, the horse is all right; but of course my information about the man is more hazy. Old Bill has been out every morning himself, I hear, and that's something; and of course there's no one up there whom I could trust to furnish me with the exact state of the case. There is nothing to make one suspect there is anything wrong except this disposition to lay against the colt."

"Well, Bellaton is a pretty close borough. Old Bill is not given to stand any prying into the secrets of his training-ground. The chances are these people don't know anything certain, but are speculating on his past unsteadiness. I'll tell you what though, old man, there'll be no harm in having a second string."

"By gad you're right," replied Slade; "I'll see about it at once, and engage the best available jockey, in case Bill is—well—too unwell to ride."

"Rather dull of us not to think of it before," replied the Baronet, "it will be difficult to pick out a good man now, all the best are engaged. A good jockey is always a great point, but over the Derby course it is an essential. That race has been oftener won by riding than any other in England."

"Quite right! we must do the best we can; and if Bill is only himself I'd ask no better jockey; but I'll lose no time in seeing about somebody to take his place."

It may be perhaps because it is the greatest race in England, because it is the greatest race in the world, that whenever the finish of the Derby is a very close thing, there is invariably much discussion as to whether with another jockey the second horse ought not to have been first. In '52 it was said that Frank Butler, the victor, could have won upon any one of the first four. In '66, when Lord Lyon defeated Savernake by a head, dissatisfaction was expressed by the supporters of the latter at his rider's performance. They change the jockey at Doncaster, and the Epsom form was confirmed to an eye-lash. Veteran Turfites still wrangle in club smoking-rooms as to whether Macaroni did beat Lord Clifton, and whether Pero Gomez or Pretender really won the Derby. These are things to which we can only appeal to the judge's verdict. But there is probably no race more calculated to demand all the resources of a fine horseman—nerve, head, judgment of pace, etc.—than the great national contest on Epsom Downs.

As the day drew near Charlie became feverishly anxious on the subject; he listened eagerly for every rumour he could hear concerning it; and, as may be supposed, in the sporting neighbourhood in which he was quartered "the shaves" were numerous. Fresh horses cropped up in the betting who were reported to have won trials, that, if true, must have placed the race at their mercy.

Charlie was very anxious that Gilbert should write to his uncle, and once more inquire what he thought of Belisarius's chance; but the other was decided in his rejoinder.

"You don't know my uncle, or you would never suggest such a thing. If I began to bother him about racing, he not only would never tell me anything again, but fight very shy of me to boot. No, when we get up to London I'll just ask him then, and have no doubt that he'll tell me what he knows. I vote we are off Saturday, and make a good long week of it."

"All right!" replied young Devereux, "I'm good to start whenever you give the word." And accordingly the morning of that day the pair took their places in the express for town, Charlie almost smothered in the sporting papers that he had bought with which to beguile the way.

The vaticinations of the various writers on the coming race afforded him considerable comfort, as most of the prophets predicted the success of Belisarius—and with Charlie the victory of that colt meant extrication from a very unpleasant scrape. As for Bertie Slade, he was very silent; except for his companion's sake, he felt rather indifferent as to the result of the Derby. His mind was absorbed in the one question, Could this thing be true? Was Lettice Devereux really engaged to that fellow Furzedon? He would know for certain this week—aye, know from her own lips. And yet, when he thought of that, it did not seem quite so easy as he had first pictured it. He did not feel that he could ask her the question unless he could plead his own love, and the hope that he had not told his own tale too late. To offer her formal congratulations, and so get at the truth that way, would, he felt, be a mockery—almost an insult. Was it likely that either Mrs. Kynaston or Charlie would be misinformed about a thing like this? No; he had been a fool; he might have known that a girl like Lettice Devereux would not be left to wait long for the gathering. He had flattered himself he had a chance, and he thought he had stood high in her good graces; but then he had not declared himself. Still, to be cut out by a fellow like Furzedon—a brute whose only redeeming point was, apparently, that he had money. He knew next to nothing of Furzedon, and had no knowledge whatever of the many objectionable points connected with that gentleman's career; but a rejected suitor—and, if this story of Charlie's was true, he might regard himself in that light—rarely forms a just estimate of his successful rival.

How it would have stirred Bertie Slade's pulses could he but have known that his rival was deeply interested in this race, that he had travelled all the way from York to see, interested, but in just the contrary way. Chiefly as

a means of wringing a reluctant consent from Miss Deve-reux, Furzedon was awaiting with no little impatience the defeat of Belisarius. He was prepared to go, indeed, no little length to compass it, should he only see his way without much risk of detection. He turned the thing over again and again in his mind, and at last thought he saw his way to assist at that conclusion. To attempt to bribe Bill Smith would be useless, the horse was his own ; and, even supposing he could be bought, it would probably require a large sum to make it better worth his while to lose than to win. Then, too, Bill Smith was a notoriously queer-tempered man, difficult to approach on so delicate a subject, and quite likely to denounce him at once to the stewards of the meeting, an open scandal which Furzedon shuddered to think of. But he might be got at through his besetting weakness, and the emissaries he employed would leave no tangible evidence behind them. Genial souls only too pleased to fill the wine-cup, and hobnob with the famous jockey, who could suspect them of ulterior motives ?

Pecuniarily also Furzedon desired the favourite's defeat. Dick Kynaston had wormed out that the shrewd speculators who so persistently opposed Belisarius were acting upon the belief that when it came to the point Bill Smith would be in no condition to ride, and that at the eleventh hour the securing of even a decent jockey would be impossible. Ralph Furzedon and the Major, acting on this inspiration, had followed suit, and now stood numbered amongst the pronounced opponents of Belisarius ; in fact, that colt's victory would cost them both a considerable sum of money. Furzedon had very little doubt that the two or three book-makers who so persistently laid against the horse would endeavour to assist their own forecast of Bill Smith's probable state on the Wednesday morning. Still he thought that it would be quite as well if he also did what little he could to contribute to the defeat of Belisarius. There was no necessity for taking the Major into his confidence ; on the contrary, it was far better he should know nothing whatever about it. Furzedon knew very well where to lay his hand amongst his myrmidons on a couple of the sort he wanted ; rollicking men, who would go down,

flatter the great northern jockey to the very top of his bent, swear that there never was such a horseman as he, and never such a colt as Belisarius; that they had got their very shirts on him. "And now, Mr. Smith, we'll just have a glass to drink luck on Wednesday." If the colt's other enemies were only taking like steps to ensure his defeat, then, thought Furzedon, with a grim smile, "wherever Bill Smith may finish it won't be first, unless the devil takes care of his own. And then, Miss Lettie, we'll see whether you're too proud to give me the right to help your brother out of his scrape."

XXVIII.—DIRE MISGIVINGS.

THE Derby week has come at last. The leading competitors for the great race all got safely to Epsom, and the papers teem with reports of the morning gallops, and comment freely on how the horses do their respective work. All are unanimous in praising the favourite, pronounced to have improved much since he won the Two Thousand, and reported as having galloped the whole course in rare style on the Monday morning. Tattersall's is in a great bustle that day. Not only was there all the business of comparing to be got through; and this checking off of their various debts takes some little time with extensive speculators; but towards the finish there was some rather smart wagering on the coming event. There was plenty of money both for and against Belisarius; but, as Mr. Black had said, it did not seem to matter how much money the public heaped upon the colt there was still always plenty to be laid against him. The stable commission had been long ago exhausted—it was a small stable. Mr. William Smith was a poor man, and he and his friends had very soon succeeded in getting all the money they could afford on at highly remunerative prices. The greater part of their commission had been negotiated before the horse had made his successful *début* at Newmarket; and, though they had not hesitated—notably Sir

Ronald—to put down a considerable portion of their winnings in support of the colt's Epsom chance, yet that soon came to an end, and it was the public now who were backing Belisarius.

Outside the subscription-room, walking up and down in earnest conference, were Furzedon and Dick Kynaston.

"It's true, Major. I can thoroughly depend upon my man. Those fellows who got the hint were quite right to never leave Belisarius, and we were quite right to follow their lead. Old Bill Smith is located at the 'Red Lion' at Epsom, and well upon the drink. If the secret leaks out, the horse will be at double his present price before the flag drops."

"They can't get anybody else to ride," rejoined the Major, "at this time of day. And, if Bill Smith gets up in that state, it will be all the odds against his being in the first three, much less winning. I suppose there is not much chance of his pulling himself together between this and then?"

"No," replied Furzedon, glancing sharply around, to be sure that there was nobody within earshot. "My informant says that he is surrounded by a little knot who wouldn't give him the chance, even if he were so minded."

"I can't think what his friends are about," replied Kynaston, moodily. "Norman Slade and Radcliffe are his two chief supporters, and there are no two keener hands on the Turf. They know Bill Smith better than any of us, and Radcliffe we know, at all events, is standing to win a lot of money over it. Are you sure they have not a second string?"

"Such a thing has never been hinted at," replied Furzedon; "besides, my good fellow, the bill of the play is out now. We know what every one rides—what all the leading jockeys are booked for. Of course, there is always the stable-boy; but we know what a muddle *he* usually makes of it."

"I'll tell you what it is, Furzedon," said the Major. "I've seen some queer dodges take place at the last moment. There is such a thing, remember, as a friendly resignation of claim upon a jockey's services. I can't help thinking

men like Slade and Radcliffe would be prepared for such a probable contingency as Bill Smith's inebriety. If the horse looks well, and I see anybody else upon it, I shall take back the money I have laid against him at the last moment."

"That you must do as you like about," replied his companion, "but I've done here. Are you going westwards?"

"Not yet," replied Kynaston.

"Then for the present adieu," said Furzedon; and as he strolled homewards through the park he wondered whether there was a chance of such a trap as the Major hinted at having been set for the opponents of Belisarius.

Trap it could not be called. If Sir Ronald Radcliffe or Slade had made some such arrangement with another jockey, they were only doing their best for owner, trainer, horse, and the public.

Charlie Devereux, incited by a lot of youthful acquaintance at Limmer's, to which hostelrie Bertie and himself had betaken themselves on their arrival in the metropolis, had backed the favourite for a good deal more money. He had been further moved to do this by Norman Slade's laconic reply to Bertie's inquiry as to how Belisarius was. "Never was better" had been his uncle's rejoinder; but he was not disposed to be diffuse on the subject, and Bertie knew him too well to ask further questions.

Charlie Devereux had persuaded himself that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and therefore it would be his best policy to thoroughly clear himself; he would go for the gloves; in fact, he ran through all the gamut of such phrases applicable to the situation. If it came off it would be all right; if it did not, well then the smash had come, and if his friends would not rescue him there must be an end of his soldiering, and he would have to strike out some other path in life. He had said nothing of all this to Bertie, and determined that he should be left in ignorance, at all events until the race was over; and Bertie, immersed in his own worries, took little heed of the doings of his mercurial brother-officer.

The Derby morning broke clear and bright. The sun was barely well above the horizon when the vast horde of

pleasure-seekers began to pour out of London on their way to the Downs. There were those who came to gamble; those who came for an outing; those who came because it was the proper thing to do; those who came because other people were going; those who came because they always did; and that vast crowd who yearly travelled down on the chance of picking up a little money during the week in ways of which even themselves have as yet but hazy conception. Could the racing public have looked that morning, about breakfast-time, into the private sitting-room of the "Red Lion" at Epsom they would have been sore bewildered. Seated at the table whereon still stood the *débris* of breakfast was Sir Ronald Radcliffe; whilst pacing restlessly up and down the room was Norman Slade, with that glint in his eyes and half snarl about his mouth which those who knew him well were aware presaged bitter humour on his part.

"Yes," he said, in evident pursuance of their conversation, "he is just about his very worst humour this morning. He can be, as you know, as obstinate as a pig; and there is a certain stage he arrives at when he is in this way when he is neither to drive nor to lead, and that is just where Bill has got to this morning. He is sulky drunk, and, whatever we want him to do, that above all others is the thing he has set his face against."

"What sort of state is he in at present?" inquired the Baronet. "I mean, could he ride now?"

"Yes," rejoined Slade, "that is the provoking thing about it. He could; but you don't suppose he'll stay where he is. Just insinuate to him that he had better touch nothing till the race is over, and he'd ring for more drink that minute. Leave him to himself——"

"And he'll drink all the same," chimed in the Baronet. "Yes; I know my friend Bill, and when he is fairly off on the booze it would take chain-cables to hold him. Have you ventured to suggest that Tom Shaddock should ride in his place?"

"Not yet; I have succeeded in managing the whole thing capitally. Abrahams, who owns Hobbyhorse, is quite prepared to let us have Shaddock, providing we give

him a thousand if Belisarius wins; and Shaddock will be quite content to, in like manner, stand five hundred to nothing."

"Shaddock is as good as most of them," replied the Baronet. "Can't Bill be brought to accede to that arrangement?"

"We shall have to try," said Slade, "but in his present temper I am afraid not; besides, you know what he is. He looks upon himself as seven pounds better than any one else. They are all given to it; but there never was a jockey more conceited about his own riding than Bill Smith."

"Then," said Sir Ronald, "there is only one thing to be done; we shall have to tie him up to the bedpost, and lock him in his room."

Norman Slade gave vent to a grim laugh as he replied, "I wish we could; and, by Jove, we would, if he was only a trainer and jockey; but unfortunately, you see, he owns the horse, and there's no gainsaying that he has a right to do what he likes with his own. He's just in that beastly temper in which he would say that he only kept racers for the sport of the thing; and that if he couldn't ride them himself he didn't care to start them. If his colt got beat there'd be a pretty row. He and all the public with him would say that it was all our fault—that if Bill himself had been up he would have won easily."

"You're right," said Sir Ronald, moodily; "I suppose there would be a royal row; and yet, hang it, I've half a mind to chance it—it's not often one has the chance of such a *coup* as this."

"Yes," retorted Slade, "and I'm sorry for the fool himself; he stands to win a rare nice stake, and he wants it; he is never likely to get much more riding. He is not likely, in his small way, to pick up such another colt as Belisarius. To fool away this chance will be the throwing away, probably, of his last."

"Well, we've got the morning before us," said Sir Ronald, "and I can only hope that he will listen to reason. In the meantime, I shall stroll into the town and see what's doing. It was an awful bit of bad luck that I couldn't take your place at Bellaton Moor."

Left to himself, Norman Slade pondered deeply over the situation. He could see no way out of it. He knew his man far too well to suppose Bill Smith's sobriety would improve as the day wore on, nor was there the slightest chance of his getting quite *hors de combat*. He never did that; then again, the combined vanity and obstinacy of the jockey made it more improbable that he would ever consent to Tom Shaddock's taking his place. Norman had considered himself extremely fortunate in having concluded that negotiation successfully. Shaddock was a fine horseman, and quite capable of doing the colt every justice: but in his exultation he had quite overlooked the vanity of human nature and the infirmity of human temper. The jockey had not as yet left his room, and there was no use as yet, as Slade well knew, in arguing further with him. He strolled out into the town, and again saw Shaddock and Shaddock's employer. Both professed themselves perfectly willing to stand to the agreement to the very last available moment.

"Let me know half-an-hour before the numbers go up, and it will be all right, sir. My horse won't start, and Tom here very much at your service."

By this time the secret of Bill Smith's indiscretions had begun to leak out amongst those sporting men who had elected Epsom for their headquarters. That the delinquent was a small, spare, wiry man, as they well knew, made it probable that he would be able to ride the weight. But a jockey who got up to ride in a big race rather the worse for drink was no more to be relied on than in any other calling in life; and there was a manifest tendency to bet against Belisarius in consequence. Slade strolled up to the course; and, though the day was still young, the early contingents from London were already sprinkled about the betting-lawn. A very enjoyable time this: you have a chance of seeing old friends, of hearing the latest movements in the betting-market. Later on the crowd thickens, and the coming across any one becomes a mere toss-up. If it is anybody you particularly want to see the chances against that meeting taking place seem incalculably multiplied. In that stroll Norman encountered his

nephew; and to Bertie's inquiry as to whether he fancied Belisarius, replied curtly, "No; the horse is all right, but the man's all wrong. Hedge, my boy, especially if you stand to lose anything to make you feel uncomfortable;" and then Norman jumped into his fly and drove back again to Epsom, to look after the recreant jockey.

Bill Smith was having a nondescript meal, which consisted of a sandwich and a tankard of bitter beer, and was surrounded by three or four blatant flatterers, who had apparently breakfasted more largely in similar fashion.

"That's what I say, Mr. Smith," exclaimed one of these worthies, "when you come across a good horse, with a good man on the top of him, back him. That's where it is, I say; here's the best colt in England, and the best man in England a-goin' to ride him; it's good enough to go your shirt on, that's what it is; and I've gone it."

It was possible that he had; at all events there was not much appearance of his having it on.

Norman Slade pushed his way through the raffish crew, and clutching the jockey by the arm, exclaimed sternly, "Come here, Bill, no nonsense, I want to speak to you." And without more ado he led Smith into his own bedroom. "Now," he continued, "you've just thrown the Derby away. Sir Ronald and I, as well as yourself, have backed Belisarius to win us a hatful of money. The colt is fit to run for a kingdom, and *you*—do you call yourself fit to ride him?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Slade," replied Bill Smith, doggedly; "it's all very well, living on tea and toast, and going long walks muffled up in flannels when you're a fleshy man—I ain't. Don't you be afraid. I'll weigh in all right—don't you be afraid I'm over weight."

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," said Norman sharply; "what I fear is, that you won't know where the winning-post is. You've been drinking for the last three days, and you've got the 'sun in your eyes' this morning."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Slade," rejoined the jockey. "I'm just as fit to ride as I ever was in my life."

"Well, never mind that," replied Slade, "Sir Ronald and I don't think you quite your old self. We want you to hand your mount over to —"

“What! not ride my own horse,” interrupted Bill. “It’s like your d—d cheek; and who, pray, are you proposing to put up in my place?”

“Well,” rejoined Slade, “I’ve been lucky enough to secure Tom Shaddock.”

“What, Shaddock ride alongside me,” cried the now thoroughly exasperated jockey; “why, I could give him seven pounds anywhere, and I should think about ten here. No, Mr. Slade, you and your Shaddocks may go to —,” and he named a place not usually mentioned in polite circles, and strolled angrily out of the room.

“That’s the upsetting of the cockboat—our last chance,” muttered Slade. “I have only made things a bit worse. I know his beastly braggadocio temper; he’ll think it incumbent on him to take two or three strong drinks between this and the saddling-bell, and, unless we can persuade him when he has got well round Tattenham Corner to come right away, he’s certain to make a muddle of it at the finish. Hard luck!” concluded Norman, “it’s rarely men have a chance to stand to win so much money as we do this time, and if that fool could only have kept sober until it was over I verily believe it would have been landed.”

XXIX.—THE GREAT EPSOM RACE.

JUMPING once more into his fly, Slade ordered the man to drive at once to the paddock, where, as arranged, he was to meet Mr. Abrahams, Tom Shaddock, and Sir Ronald. Dismissing his fly for the present, Norman made his way into the inclosure.

“Well, Mr. Slade!” exclaimed the Israelite, “you have come to say it’s all right, and that Tom, here, is to ride Belisarius; you don’t want anything more than the market there,” and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the betting-ring, “to tell you that Bill Smith’s got a pretty bad headache this morning;” and Mr. Abrahams favoured Norman with a most expressive wink. “I’ve got a few

pounds on my own ; but, bless yer, I'd a deal rather stand in with you."

"You must do the best you can with Reflector, I shan't want your services to-day, Tom," said Norman, grimly.

"But s'help me, Mr. Slade," exclaimed Abrahams, "why it's all over the ring ; they say Bill Smith has been drunk ever since he's been here, and that it will take him about a month to get sober now."

"Well, never mind what they say, Mr. Abrahams, Bill Smith will ride Belisarius to-day, that's enough for you to know."

"No go, I see," said Sir Ronald, joining Slade as he walked away ; "can't do anything with him, I suppose ?"

"No," rejoined Norman, "I always knew it would be a delicate point. You see it is touching a man on the point of his vanity ; and the suggestion that Tom Shaddock could fill his place simply drove him wild."

"It's an awful sell," replied the Baronet, "such a good stake we stand on it, and, by Jove, old man, I really want it." And then the pair strolled off to have a look at Belisarius.

The colt was pacing up and down at the bottom end of the paddock, looking cool and collected, and quite prepared to take his part in the struggle that lay before him. The time was getting on, and already the saddling-bell for the great race clanged out upon the ear. There were a crowd of people gathered around Belisarius and scanning all his points. Another ten minutes, and a little man in a light overcoat pushes his way somewhat rudely through the throng. They make way for him, for the silken cap in the well-known colours tells them that it is the colt's jockey and owner, with a face flushed with drink. Bill Smith sullenly superintended the saddling of his horse ; another minute or two and he casts off his overcoat and is promptly thrown into the saddle. As he moves off with his horse Slade walks alongside of him and says :

"Trust to the condition you've got under you, Bill. The colt can't be fitter ; don't wait too long, but come right away, and stand no humbugging."

"All right, Mr. Slade," growled the jockey, sulkily, "I'll

come to you for a few riding-lessons when I've got this gallop over."

"Pig-headed brute!" exclaimed Sir Ronald, "neither you nor any one else can do anything with him to-day. He must 'gang his ain gait,' as they say the other side of the Border."

As Bill Smith walked his horse past the drinking-booth that stood near the entrance to the paddock, a small lot of well-dressed men issued from it. They had all glasses in their hands, and two of them bore bottles.

"Here's your health, Bill!" exclaimed one of them. "Bill Smith and Belisarius!" chorused the others. "The best man on the best horse in England; we'll drink his health, and good luck to him."

"Here you are, Bill," exclaimed the first speaker, filling a glass out of a champagne bottle, "just a glass of fizz for luck, Bill," and he handed a brimming goblet up to Smith, who, bending over his saddle, took it, and sang out, "All right, lads, you'll see what a mess I'll make of 'em after we get round Tattenham Corner!" and, tossing off the liquor, he threw the glass back to the man who had handed it to him.

If at first sight it seems odd that nobody interfered to prevent this tampering with the jockey on his way to the post, it must be borne in mind that Bill Smith stood in the singular position of being owner, trainer, and jockey. However, even as it was, there was an attempt to stop it. Norman Slade and Sir Ronald, following in the rear of the horse, caught sight of this little crowd, and, at the last moment, grasped their design. They both rushed forward to interfere, but it was too late; the cup was drained and tossed back to its giver before Slade could intercept it. But he turned quick as lightning upon the donor, and said, "I want your name, sir; this looks to me very like an attempt to hocus the jockey of the favourite."

"My name!" replied the other, "what the deuce have you got to do with my name, and who are you to dare to find fault with my giving a glass of wine to a gentleman riding his own horse?"

But Norman Slade had not lived all his life about town

in the days when pugilism was patronised by the greatest in the land, without having learnt to use his hands. He advanced determinedly on his foe, exclaiming as he did so, "Quick, Radcliffe, call the police; I'll keep this gentleman employed till they come."

But these two things produced a decided change in the blustering demeanour of the dark, florid-looking gentleman who still held the bottle of champagne in his hand. He knew Sir Ronald Radcliffe was well-known amongst all leading gentlemen of the turf. He knew also that the interference of the police would at once create a great public scandal, and that was the last thing Ralph Furzedon desired. Suddenly changing his manner, he exclaimed—

"You have thought proper to accuse me of hoccussing a jockey. Will you have a glass of champagne? Get a couple of clean glasses there, one of you."

"Yes," said Norman, quickly, "I will, and a full one. I shall know then what it is you have put down Bill Smith's throat."

"Quite right," replied the other, with a mocking smile; "ah! here come the glasses." And from the self-same bottle he proceeded to fill them to the very brim. Handing one to Norman, he took the other himself, and said—

"Now, sir, we will drink to the success of Belisarius," and with a low bow he drained his glass to the dregs, as also did Slade.

"Well, sir," he continued, "I hope you found the wine to your liking?"

"Far from it," rejoined Slade, "race-course champagne, and bad at that, but I withdraw my accusation. Good-day, sir." "Come and see it, Radcliffe," he continued, taking the Baronet's arm, "I can swear he never changed the bottle, for I never took my eye off him. I believe it to be only what I said; but at all events," he concluded, laughing, "I shall know in less than half an hour."

They walked up the course until they arrived at the Grand Stand, and, looking into the betting-lawn for a few moments, found that a reaction had set in in favour of Belisarius. The colt had gone badly in the market during the morning, but when he came out, looking fine as a star,

and with the redoubtable Bill Smith on his back, there was a rush to back him, both on the part of the public and on those who, thinking that he would have a very inferior jockey on his back, had laid against him. Drunk or sober, Bill Smith was equally at home in the saddle, and, as he gripped his horse and brought him rattling down the course, sitting straight and square in his saddle, few would have dreamt that the drink was already seething in that resolute horseman's brain. That canter past the Stand done with, the lot proceed quietly across towards the starting-post, and here at once Bill Smith's irritable temper begins to show itself. There is always some little manœuvring for places on these occasions—some of the most eminent jockeys are notably whimsical upon this point, and Bill Smith was one of these. It was an axiom of his to have the inside from the beginning, if he could compass it, and he would dodge and make unscrupulous use of his well-garnished vocabulary to attain this end; and more than one of his fellow-jockeys would yield the point sooner than encounter the lash of Bill Smith's scurrilous tongue. He was worse than usual on this occasion, and, inflamed by drink, ventured to favour the starter with some of his choice observations. He was too preoccupied in railing at those around him to attend strictly to the business in hand, and, when that functionary, by no means prepossessed in his, Bill Smith's favour, suddenly dropped his flag, instead of making the best use of his opportunity, the be-mused jockey hesitated, not quite believing it was an actual start. Even when he awoke to the fact he still further complicated matters by waiting to hurl a torrent of abuse at the starter before setting his horse going.

"They're off," roared the crowd. "Pooh! nonsense! False start!" was the cry immediately afterwards, succeeded quickly by the shout, "It's a go, by heaven! and the favourite's left at the post." Yes, there, true enough, were the horses sweeping up the hill in a cluster, and the favourite at least a hundred yards in their rear.

"It's all over, Norman!" exclaimed the Baronet, as he wearily dropped his glasses; "and the best thing we've been in for many a day is chucked away by a drunken fool."

Norman Slade made no reply, he was busied straining his eyes to catch sight of the horses, and even as they went through "the furzes" he fancied that Belisarius had made up a little of his ground. Then the lot were all out of sight, and when next he caught sight of them, the dark blue jacket and scarlet cap of Bill Smith were still toiling far in the rear. As they came down the hill it was evident that the Bellaton horse had closed the portentous gap that separated him from his field considerably. Then they came round Tattenham Corner, and if ever a jockey shaved the rails there it was Bill Smith upon this occasion. Muddled though he was, he knew he was so far behind them that he could not afford to throw away an inch of ground, and a bit of his old skill was exhibited in the way he crept up to his horses. But it was a long gap to make up, and the old patience and coolness began to fail him. Half way up the straight he began to get nervous at the distance he was still behind; if the race was to be won at all it could only be done inch by inch, with one determined rush on the very post. Bill Smith began to bustle his horse, and Belisarius, who had been engaged in a weary stern-chase from the commencement, soon showed signs that the struggle had told upon him. The fierce excitement of the gallop, the nervous anxiety to win such a valuable stake for himself and friends, were too much for Bill Smith, on the top of the drink that he had consumed before starting; he lost his head, and instead of waiting till the last moment with that consummate coolness which had often electrified the Southerners, and brought many a roar from Yorkshire throats on Doncaster Moor, he sat down just before reaching the Stand, and commenced riding his horse in earnest. Gamely did Belisarius respond to the call, and the colt's final flash was brilliant in the extreme. For one second he threatened to overhaul the leaders, and a cry went up, "The favourite wins! The favourite wins!" but in the next half-dozen strides his bolt was shot, he died away to nothing; and when the numbers went up Belisarius was not amongst the first three.

The race is over, and Harold by The Confessor, out of Dauntless, is hailed the winner of the Derby of 18—.

Norman Slade greeted the hoisting of the victor's number with a "splendid groan," like unto that with which Mr. Disraeli tells us Lord George Bentinck received the news of Surplice's triumph. As for Sir Ronald he said nothing aloud; he was a 'good loser, and it was seldom the way the battle went could be traced in his calm, passionless features; but upon this occasion I think there was a muttered imprecation against Bill Smith, and a resolution to depend upon that unstable reed no more. As for that worthy he was half mad with rage and disappointment; his language in the weighing-room was what Bret Harte describes as—"Frequent and painful and free."

He poured forth a torrent of abuse on the starter, he vowed it was no race, he objected to everything in the et cetera, cetera race, he wanted to lodge an objection, he wanted to appeal to the stewards, and it wasn't until he had received a peremptory intimation that, if he didn't quit the weighing-room without more words the authorities would be compelled to have him removed, the discomfited jockey could be induced to retire. As far as the general public goes their sympathies were with Bill Smith; they did not know how it happened, but they did understand that he had somehow been left behind, and were very much inclined, like Bill Smith himself, to lay the blame upon the starter. But the regular racing-men knew better; they knew very well whose fault it was, and that the famous jockey of the North had no one to blame but himself.

However, it is little use to argue upon how the milk was spilt, upon how it all happened on this occasion. The fiat of the judge has gone forth, and is irrevocable. Some rumours there were of an "objection" in the first few minutes after the race, the consequence these of Bill Smith's wild ravings. But such report met with but little credence to begin with, and was speedily contradicted. On the top of the drag opposite the Grand Stand, with some half-a-dozen other men consoling themselves for their disappointment with a capital lunch, was Charlie Devereux.

"Rather a facer, old man," remarked one of his companions. "They've got me for four hundred. I thought

Belisarius couldn't lose; but he got such an awful bad start."

"I don't know how it happened," replied Charlie. "But I feel quite sure that he had no business to be left behind like that."

"The starter ought to be had up before the stewards," said another. "If he had only got off he must have won. Look at the ground he made up towards the finish."

"Struck me," rejoined Charlie, "that he was in rather too great a hurry to get home. If he'd had a little more patience he must have been very near winning. The horse ran game as a bull-dog; but I know what that follow-my-leader game is. I was taught the lesson the first time I rode in public, and just as I caught my horses found I had come to the end of my own."

"Yes," replied one of his companions. "It stands to reason that after making up all that leeway there can be but a very brief flash left in your horse when you call upon him for his supreme effort."

Charlie nodded assent; but the discussion was idle; the one fact remained that he had lost a lot of money, and that it had to be paid by the following Monday.

XXX.—RAISING THE WIND.

IN one of Disraeli's earlier novels he tells us of a certain marquis and his spouse, who, finding themselves inconvenienced by the simple process of spending two years' income in one, determined to economise, and, abandoning the delights of London, betake themselves to the country with a view to that laudable sacrifice. But as they consider that the mere fact of such retirement of itself constitutes economy, and that the country is unendurable without a fashionable mob to inhabit their country-seat, which distinguished mob must be regaled upon all the best there is to eat and drink in the land, they awake to the fact that their scheme of retrenchment is a failure, and, as the

marchioness sweetly observes, "henceforth expense is no object." In like manner men in their early gambling scrapes are always apt to think that a little more makes no difference. Charlie Devereux's "plunge" upon Belisarius has been already rather upon the double or quits principle. And that he should feel it incumbent to back Maritana for the Oaks, with a view to recovering his Derby losses, was strictly in accord with all race-going experience; and that Maritana should occupy the same ignoble position, namely, that of unplaced, at the termination of that classic contest, was only the customary result of such attempt to retrieve his losses. Charlie felt a little sick when he saw Maritana collapse hopelessly just before the real bitter finish began; and as he travelled back to town pondered gloomily as to where he was to obtain the necessary funds with which to settle his accounts on the Monday.

Now, to obtain a considerable sum of money at such short notice as is given, from Friday night to Monday afternoon, there is no reliance to be placed upon any but the children of Israel. A large sum of money is, of course, to be regarded with due respect as to your position and securities; but, given these both unimpeachable, it is usually to the money-lender that you must go to obtain it in time. The terms naturally vary in accordance with the risk to be run. To a man with undoubted tangible property, who only requires a few weeks to raise the necessary sum, his charges will be comparatively lenient; but in the case of a customer like Charlie he will undoubtedly demand to be paid in proportion to the risk. Charlie's experience of London usurers was happily limited; it would have been better for him had it been still more limited; but with no little perturbation on Saturday morning he jumped into a cab, and drove down to the offices of Messrs. Jordan & Co., finance agents, whose business premises were in Northumberland Street, Strand. There he saw the representative of that shadowy firm, and who, knowing his master's views with regard to Mr. Charles Devereux's paper, informed him that he thought it was possible it might be done; that money was scarce, and he would have to pay high for it; but that he could say nothing

positively until he had consulted his partner from the city. If Mr. Devereux would call upon him between eleven and twelve on Monday morning he would be able to give him a definite answer. And in the event of their being able to accommodate him at all the money should be handed over to him then and there. And with such comfort Charlie betook himself back to Limmer's, and bethought himself what an egregious fool he was, and what a precious tale it was now incumbent upon him to unfold to his father.

He had seen but little of Bertie Slade since their arrival in London; they were both staying at Limmer's, but, whereas Charlie pretty well lived there, Gilbert only slept there. Gilbert naturally lunched, dined, etc., at the Thermopolium, but Charlie as yet had not obtained entrance to one of those exclusionary palaces. It was, perhaps, this that had lured him to his undoing. His associates at Limmer's were all young gentlemen similarly situated to himself, whom he had known in the first place at the University, and who had now joined Her Majesty's service. It was a fastish hotel in those days. I am talking of the old house, and before carpets desecrated the sanded floor of the famous coffee-room—scene of so many mad-cap revels, of such wild betting, and in which so many prize-fights had been arranged and eccentric matches concocted. Not a very good academy for a young gentleman to commence his studies of life in London. He had not as yet confided the extent of his losses at Epsom to any one. Although he had seen Mrs. Kynaston on the Thursday afternoon, and she had condoled with him sweetly on his ill-luck, yet he had not even confessed to her that things were still worse than she knew of. He had telegraphed to his colonel for a couple more days' leave, to enable him to confer with Jordan & Co. upon the Monday, and received a favourable reply to his request. Very much astounded was Bertie Slade when he discovered that afternoon that Charlie was not to be his travelling companion.

"No; I wired to the chief for two days' more leave, and have got it. The fact is, old man, I'm in a deuce of a scrape, much worse than you know of."

"I see," interrupted Bertie, hastily, "you were fool enough to pile a lot more money on Belisarius."

"Just so," replied Devereux, "and I've had to go where I did before to find the money to settle with. There's no doubt about it now, I shall have to tell the story at North Leach."

"I am afraid so," said Slade; "the sooner the better, but it's time I was off. I suppose we shall see you down on Monday night," and with a nod of adieu Bertie Slade took his departure. He had had a most unsatisfactory week. I don't mean in the way of racing, for he had lost but very little money, and cared less about it. His main object in London had been to see Lettice, and in that he had been grievously disappointed. He had called twice, and upon both occasions found neither Miss Devereux nor Mrs. Connop at home. He had been more fortunate with Mrs. Kynaston, but had derived scant comfort from his visit there. That lady, without actually committing herself to the unvarnished statement that Lettice and Mr. Furzedon were engaged, sent him away quite under that impression.

"It's not announced, you know, but nobody has the slightest doubt that it is so. Mr. Furzedon has for months made no secret of his admiration for Miss Devereux. I am sure, Mr. Slade, he has bored me to death with it. She has only had to hold up her finger any time the last six months to bring him to his knees, and—well—I suppose at last she has done it."

"And I suppose there's nothing more to be said now but to offer our congratulations," replied Bertie. "Furzedon is a man I don't much fancy myself—he is not quite my sort."

"You are quite right, Mr. Slade," said the lady, with a slight curl of her lip. "I should not think he was; but he is an excellent match, and that is more to the purpose to a young lady on promotion. I hope you were more fortunate than Mr. Devereux, who told me he had a very bad race. My husband was in luck. He heard—I don't know how—that there was something wrong about Belisarius; that his jockey couldn't be trusted, or something of that

sort; and both he and Mr. Furzedon won a nice little stake over it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Bertie, with some interest. "Then there may be something in a wild report that there is flying about. It's rumoured that Smith, the jockey who rode Belisarius, was hocused as he was leaving the paddock. The man is given to drink, and was induced to have a glass of wine for luck."

"Really," said Mrs. Kynaston, "this is the first I have heard of it. Dick says there's generally a *canard* of that sort when the favourite for a big race gets beaten."

"I dare say he is right," replied Slade, "and that this report is perfectly unfounded," and then Bertie rose and wished Mrs. Kynaston "Good-bye," receiving strict injunctions from that lady to be sure to come and see her again when he was next in town.

A very clever woman was Mrs. Kynaston, but, in such delicate scheming as she was at present perpetrating, the dropping of one stitch, the slightest mistake, suffices to destroy the entire web. From her lips had just fallen words the import of which it was impossible she could foresee. In the idlest way she had told Bertie Slade that Furzedon had profited by the defeat of Belisarius. Now, Bertie's Uncle Norman was not only a considerable sufferer from that result, but he had also seen who it was that handed the wine to Bill Smith. He did not know who Furzedon was, but was not likely now to forget his face. A hard, resolute man, no one was more likely to perseveringly unmask a robbery than Norman Slade. And, if he should happen to hear from his nephew that the giver of that glass of wine had a direct interest in Bill Smith's not winning the race, he was likely to investigate the matter thoroughly; and, as we know Furzedon had by no means clean hands in the whole business, such a charge as that substantiated against him would mean social bankruptcy as far as Mr. Furzedon was concerned.

The weak place in the web that Mrs. Kynaston had taken such pains to weave—and she was painfully aware of it—was the fact that her fib about Lettice's engagement was in hourly danger of exposure. It was hardly

possible, she thought, that Charlie Devereux could see his sister without congratulating her upon her engagement. He had not seen her yet, but she knew that he was bound to call in Onslow Gardens before he went back to York. It is true she had sworn him to secrecy, that she had told him it was not yet announced, vowed that she ought never to have told him, pointed out that he would get her into a most awful scrape if he divulged it. "You'll promise me," she had said, "not to open your mouth about it; Lettie would never forgive me if you didn't hear it first from her own lips." And Charlie had sworn to keep silence on the subject. But Mrs. Kynaston doubted whether he would find it possible. Then again Lettice herself might allude to it as an absurd rumour which she requested him to contradict. She did not think she would do so; still it was a thing quite likely to happen. Mrs. Kynaston knew that Mr. Slade had called at Onslow Gardens, but she had also ascertained unsuccessfully, and that had been a great piece of luck, as far as she was concerned, and she now hoped that both he and Charlie were well on their way back to York.

That, as far as the latter was concerned, we know was not the case. But he proved loyal to his trust. He went down to Onslow Gardens on the Sunday, and saw both his aunt and his sister. They thought him rather absent and *distract*, and, taking advantage of their being left alone for a few minutes, Lettie pressed him pretty closely as to what was the matter, and then Charlie disburdened his soul. He told her he had lost a terrible lot of money on racing, and that there was nothing for it but to go to his father.

"If he won't see me through it my military career must come to an abrupt termination. I've been an awful fool I know, and if the governor don't stand to me I'm likely to be sharply punished for my folly. I like my profession, and it will be bitter grief to me to have to give it up."

"Is it very big, Charlie? How much money do you suppose would clear you?"

"I hardly know, but it would take a lot."

"Father will scold," rejoined Lettie, "and you can't be much surprised at that. I think it is possible that Aunt

Sarah might help a little. Five hundred would see you through, I suppose?"

"Wouldn't be a bit of good," he rejoined. "It would take three times the amount."

"Oh! Charlie," exclaimed the girl, "this is a bad business. Must you have all this money immediately?"

"No," he replied; "but I must find it in a few weeks at the outside. At all events it has got to be found, sooner or later."

"And when do you intend to speak to father about it?"

"Well, I shall get a few days' leave, and come down to North Leach. How long shall you be in town?"

"I don't know exactly, but to the end of the season, I hope. But I'll come home, Charlie, if you think that I can be of any use."

"You always were a brick, Lettie!" he rejoined, kissing her; "but, hush! here comes Aunt Sarah. Not a word to any one, mind, till I tell you to speak."

Mrs. Connop was extremely pleased with her nephew, and full of questions concerning his military life. She expressed her intention of giving Harrogate a turn when the real hot weather set in. "Then," she continued, "we'll come over to York, and review the regiment, or whatever you call it." And after a little desultory *badinage* of this description, Charlie took his departure.

The next morning young Devereux made his way to Jordan & Co.'s. He found the representative of that firm quite ready to receive him.

"I have conferred with my partners, Mr. Devereux," he observed; "and they wish me to point out that we are holding a good deal of paper of yours. I'll admit that your getting into the army renders us a little more secure than we were, but we don't very much care about advancing any further money. Still, we don't wish to leave an old customer in the lurch; and, therefore, if you will write your name across this bill, we are prepared to let you have it at once; but you will observe that this bill is at thirty days' sight; in short, our advance is only meant to enable you to look round and procure the money elsewhere."

Charlie thought for a moment; "I must go to the gov-

error," he muttered, "and the sooner the better. My racing account must be settled to-day, but a month will be ample time in which to come to an explanation at home."

"All right!" he said; "I shall not want it for longer. I'm paying dear enough for it, as it is, and have no wish to pay still further for accommodation."

"Quite right, Mr. Devereux," replied the usurer, as he counted out a bundle of notes. "The dearest thing you can buy in the world is money, with the exception of experience; and when you've got the latter, you will never buy the former."

"Come, I say," replied Charlie, "I don't see what you've got to complain about."

"I don't complain," rejoined the money-lender, laughing. "It's my trade, and though it's by no means so good as it looks—as we have to run great risks, and at times incur frightful losses,—still, I often wonder we have so many customers as we do. I think you'll find that right, sir;" and as he concluded he pushed the notes across to Charlie.

"Quite right, I thank you," rejoined Devereux, and, blithely nodding a good morning to Jordan & Co., he shot out of the dingy office.

XXXI.—FURZEDON RETURNS TO THE CHARGE.

THE exultation of Furzedon at the results of the Derby week was unbounded. It was not merely that he won a good bit of money, but that Charlie Devereux should unknowingly have come to him for assistance in his difficulties was a piece of rare good fortune. Find the wherewithal for Devereux to settle with, of course he would; he would have found double the amount. It was forging the very weapon he wanted and placing it in his hands; the worst of those bills he held was that no proceedings could be taken upon them for some time, but he had purposely instructed his agent that

this time the loan should be for only a month ; he knew very well how quickly a month slipped away under those circumstances ; he knew very well that Charlie would have the greatest disinclination to apply to his father, and he felt pretty sure that he would not until the last extremity ; that he would do so at last Furzedon never doubted, any more than he did that Tom Devereux in the end would pay the money ; he was running no risk if he could use this as an engine with which to induce Lettie Devereux to marry him. Well and good, he would be only too glad to wipe off Charlie's debts as the price of her hand. If, on the contrary, she declined to make this sacrifice in her brother's interest, well he, at all events, was not likely to be any loser by what he had done. Sacrifice, forsooth ! There was not much sacrifice about it ; there were plenty of girls in Lettie's position who would only be too glad to share the comfortable home and income he could offer them. But the difficulties in his way had only increased his desire to make Lettice his wife.

He was one of those obstinate dispositions that opposition merely stimulates ; how he had come to wish for this marriage he would have been somewhat puzzled to explain, so dexterously had the idea been poured into his mind by Mrs. Kynaston, that he was hardly conscious of that lady being the originator of it. She was his confidant, she approved of it and encouraged it ; he knew all that, but he still failed to recognise that, but for Mrs. Kynaston, it would probably never have entered his head to seek Lettice Devereux in marriage. Now he was committed to it, and was resolved to leave no stone unturned to bring it about. The overthrow of Belisarius, and Charlie's consequent necessities, would enable him to exercise pressure at once, and he determined before June was over that Miss Devereux should be strongly urged, for her brother's sake, to reconsider her late decision. That any harm could possibly accrue to him from the small part he had taken in the Belisarius Derby, Ralph Furzedon would have laughed to scorn. Poisoning a horse or poisoning a man are offences that come clearly within the grasp of the law, but to simply encourage a drunkard in his inebriety, ah ! well,

there is no penalty against that. But, though a man may escape all legal consequences of his acts, there sometimes follows a social crucifixion, which, with Furzedon's aims and ambitions, is pretty well as bitter, and, little as he thinks of it, just such a storm is slowly gathering round Ralph Furzedon's head.

Miss Devereux was not a little put out at missing Mr. Slade. It was most provoking; his calling twice showed that he was undoubtedly anxious to see her, and if they could but have met she thought that at all events that one question would have been solved, which she was so anxious to determine—whether he was in earnest in his intentions to herself or not. Mrs. Kynaston had warned her against giving much credence to the soft speeches of “those Dragons.” She had dwelt upon the fact that he had never thought it worth while to come down to North Leach for that week's hunting; she had ridiculed the idea that Charlie could not get leave, though Charlie protested himself such was the case; but let Mrs. Kynaston laugh as she pleased. there was no getting over the fact that during a week like the last, a week in which men's hands are generally full of engagements, Mr. Slade had twice endeavoured to see her. She talked matters over a little with her aunt, and that lady, who in her quiet undemonstrative way would have been as much pleased with the girl's engagement to Bertie Slade as she had been the reverse at the idea of her marrying Ralph Furzedon, laughed merrily, and said:

“It will be time enough to think what you will do with him when he is an avowed pretender to your hand. In the meantime, nothing will persuade me that he is not thoroughly honest in his admiration. It may be that he don't quite see the ways and means. I think, for the present, it is a case for suspending judgment, my dear. It is very unlucky our being out upon each occasion that he called.”

So Miss Devereux took much comfort from her aunt's counsel. Gilbert Slade would no doubt contrive to see her before the season was over. York was no distance from London, and he would find little difficulty in obtaining leave, if he wished for it,

But there was another thing which, just now, occasioned Lettie considerable annoyance. Thanks to Mrs. Kynaston's malicious tongue, the report of her engagement had been spread pretty widely amongst her friends and acquaintance. She was constantly exposed to most embarrassing remarks from her friends. One of these, for instance, would whisper into her ear no end of congratulations. "I am so glad, dear." And when Miss Devereux retorted, "Congratulations—what about? I am sure I don't understand you," the other would reply, "I beg pardon; I'm sure I've no wish to be premature, but I thought it was quite an open secret!"

In vain did Lettie try to combat all such felicitations; it was useless; the rumour was too strong for her. It had spread about that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Furzedon, and the world refused to believe anything else. On the contrary, it scolded Lettie behind her back for denying it. "Such nonsense!" remarked her friends. "Why cannot she openly announce it? What on earth can she want to make a secret and a mystery of it for?" Mr. Furzedon, too, contributed not a little to this belief. He contrived to obtain most accurate information of Miss Devereux's movements, and wherever Lettice went, there, if he could manage it, was Mr. Furzedon. He played his *rôle*, too, perfectly on such occasions; he was not so obtrusive in his attentions as to give the girl any opportunity of sharply declining them. He was scrupulously polite—rather too formally so, people said, for an affianced lover; but he was always there *en evidence*, and giving the idea that he was in attendance on Miss Devereux. Lettie chafed terribly under what she considered this persecution, but she was powerless to put an end to it, unless she gave up society altogether. Mr. Furzedon was far too cunning to allow her to come to an explanation, and bore the rebuffs he occasionally encountered with imperturbable serenity.

In the meantime Miss Devereux was also much troubled in her mind at not hearing from Charlie. As the month of June slipped by and brought no letter, she began to fear that he had committed some still greater folly than before; debts don't pay themselves, and Charlie had no one to go

to except his father or Mrs. Connop, and in either case Lettice felt sure that she would have heard of it. What was he doing? He had told her himself that the settlement of his liabilities admitted of little delay, and still, oddly enough, she had heard nothing whatever of him. He had promised to write; and, bad correspondent though he was, yet, upon this occasion, she did think he would have kept his word. She had no idea that Charlie or Mr. Slade had heard anything of this silly report about her engagement. It had never crossed her mind that this rumour had reached York. Charlie never mentioned that he corresponded with Mrs. Kynaston; nor had he seen fit to tell her of that visit to town some few weeks back. Lettie's friendship with Mrs. Kynaston had rather cooled of late, and, indeed, would have cooled considerably more still if that lady would have allowed it to do so, but Mrs. Kynaston had no idea of that. It did not suit her at all to have any breach with the Devereuxes; and when accused of the mischief she had done by her foolish speaking—for Lettie indignantly taxed her with having originated this report concerning herself and Mr. Furzedon—she was full of apologies for the mischief she had unwittingly done. She denied emphatically that she was the founder of the story; she had heard it—well, she really could not say where, how, or from whom; and she admitted that she had been indiscreet enough to mention it to two or three people. Lettie knew that she had always told her that she might be Mrs. Furzedon if she willed; she really thought it would come about; and that, though not announced, it was quite an open secret. She was sorry if she had done wrong; but she honestly believed that a more harmless bit of news she had never passed on in society; and, more than that, she was only sorry to hear it was not true. In short, Mrs. Kynaston would not quarrel, and therefore Lettie was compelled to some extent to continue the old friendship.

Mr. Furzedon had never made his appearance in Onslow Gardens since his failure; but one morning towards the end of May Lettie received a note from him to say that he would call about three in the afternoon, and most

earnestly entreating her to see him alone, if not otherwise engaged. When Miss Devereux showed this letter to her aunt, Mrs. Connop's bristles were all on end.

"It's ridiculous, Lettie," she said; "no wonder this report still continues about you both. No wonder he still dangles about you as far as he dare. I never asked you particulars; but I certainly understand that you had said 'No' to him decisively. Of course the man is coming down here to ask you the same question over again. Now do be resolute this time, and send him about his business."

The afternoon came. The drawing-room was duly given up to Miss Devereux, and a very few minutes after three Mr. Furzedon was announced.

"I would not have intruded upon you," he observed, "except in the interests of your family. Your brother Charlie is a very dear friend of mine; are you aware that he is in most serious money difficulties?"

"He told me as much," replied Lettice, "but won't you sit down?"

Furzedon took advantage of her invitation. "You are hardly aware," he continued, "I dare say, of what a very serious business this really is. I have learnt it, quite lately, and by accident: it seems he was not only heavily embarrassed at Cambridge, but he has further lost a great deal of money on this last Derby. He has borrowed the money at short notice to pay his Derby losses, and this money he will have to find almost immediately. He further has the Cambridge liabilities hanging over his head, and the whole thing, Miss Devereux, unless satisfactorily settled by somebody, involves the complete ruin of his career. May I ask if he has confessed the state of things to his father?"

"Allow me to ask, Mr. Furzedon, if you are in my brother's confidence?"

"No; it would be better for him if I were; but of course, as he has not thought proper to confide his troubles to me, it is impossible for me to speak to him about them."

"Still, Mr. Furzedon, I do not as yet see the object of

this interview. You are not in my brother's confidence, and acknowledge you have no claim to interfere, why then come down to discuss the subject with me?"

"Because, as you know very well, it only rests with you to give me the best of all possible rights to interfere; I am very fond of Charlie, and could wish nothing better than to save him in this crisis. As his brother-in-law, I could step in at once; before a week was out he should be free from all his embarrassments; only give me the authority I humbly sued for the other day; be my wife, Miss Devereux. You may not feel towards me now as I would wish, but my devotion must conquer, and I am content to wait for the love of which I shall be so proud."

"No, no!" she cried. "I told you before that I cannot do this thing. Thank you, Mr. Furzedon, for the compliment you have paid me, but I cannot marry you."

"Then you refuse to save your brother from ruin at the outset of his career," rejoined Furzedon, slowly.

"You have no right to say so!" she exclaimed, vehemently. "It is himself has wrought his own undoing. He can hardly expect me to save him from the consequences of his own folly."

"That is exactly what I appeal to you to do, to save him from the consequences of his own madness."

Furzedon had indirectly been the original cause of Charles Devereux's difficulties: he it was who first persuaded him—Charlie—to go to Newmarket; and his example, however unintentionally, it was that had led him into betting so much more heavily than he could afford.

"You have had your answer, sir," replied Lettie, after a pause. "It is unfair, ungenerous, to press me further on the subject."

"I can do no more," replied Furzedon, rising; "but, believe me, unless your father comes to the rescue, Charlie's soldiering days are numbered. He would have to fly the country, for his commission money will not suffice to satisfy his creditors."

"And no doubt his father will pay his debts for him," said Lettie, proudly, and with a confidence which she was far from feeling; and then Miss Devereux made him a

rather ceremonious bend, as an intimation that their interview was over.

"I'm sorry you can't think better of me. I would have saved Charlie if I could, for his own sake, I should have been doubly pleased to have done so for yours. Good-bye, Miss Devereux. You have twice said 'No' to an honest love; I can only say now, May all happiness await you!"

Very pretty words, but Lettice thought she detected a malicious sneer in the tone. It might have been merely her own fancy; still it stung her pride, and made her feel that this man had, after all, been merely bargaining for her hand.

"Thank you," she replied, bitterly; "whatever your regard for Charlie may be I strongly advise you not to let my brother know that you considered his sister's hand a fair equivalent for the liquidation of his debts."

Furzedon muttered something in reply, to the effect that she was not doing him justice, and then retired, rebuffed, but by no means disheartened. He had not been unduly sanguine, and, though there could be no doubt that he had met this time with a most unqualified refusal, yet he had no intention of abandoning his suit.

XXXII.—IN THE USURER'S FANGS.

BERTIE SLADE is back in York, and is strongly impressed with that feeling which comes to all of us when the world is not running quite to our liking—that all is vanity. He has no doubt now of Miss Devereux's engagement; and yet, as a matter of fact, he has no more grounds to go upon than when he went up to London. Mrs. Kynaston had told Charlie that it was so then, Mrs. Kynaston has told him that it is so now; analysed, the whole story rests, as it has done from the first, on Mrs. Kynaston's word. Bertie Slade is by nature a cool, resolute, clear-headed man; but it is seldom that those points stand to one in a case of this kind; and it was not until he found

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himself forestalled, and that another had stolen his love, that he became the least aware of how deeply his feelings were involved. He took it as men of his type do; he was, perhaps, a little quieter, a little graver in manner, but otherwise no one would have guessed that a great trouble was upon him, and that he had lost, as he believed, a bigger stake than any of the wild gamblers on Epsom Downs.

There are men who make plaint of their misfortunes on love's tangled pathways, who carry their hearts on their sleeves, and call upon all those they come across to condole with them upon Chloe's fickleness; men who carry their tale of woe in their faces, but whose wounds are only skin-deep; a man who would weep in response to the question of the American humourist—"Has calico proved deceitful?" But Bertie Slade was not of this kind; he might not show it, but, nevertheless, he felt the loss of Lettice Devereux very bitterly. Then he wondered what on earth Charlie meant to do; he had got to like the boy very much, and knew that he must be hovering on the very brink of ruin. Young Devereux had said nothing to him since that brief conversation at Limmer's. What did he mean to do? Surely it must be getting high time that he consulted with his father about how his difficulties were to be got over; but no, he pointedly avoided all conversation with Slade on the subject, and to any inquiries about when he was going to North Leach rejoined carelessly, "It didn't matter for two or three weeks yet," and Bertie did not care to force his confidence. How or upon what terms Charlie had raised money to settle his Epsom debts Slade did not know; but he felt convinced that if he did not take counsel with his father there would be an explosion before many weeks were over his head.

The fact was, that, with all his gay, careless, *insouciant*, manner, Charlie Devereux was by no means on a bed of roses. He too knew the explosion must come, and he knew further how very near it was at hand, but, like many men of his type, he shrank from all unpleasantness; physical danger he would have faced without a moment's hesitation, but he shirked that *mauvais quart d'heure* with his father, like the veriest craner does the brook in a stiff

country. He knew that it must be ; but that, he argued, was no reason that it should be before it was imperative. He rocked himself to sleep with the idea that he could not well ask for leave again so soon, and that it would be time enough for him to go to North Leach and make full confession when it was notified to him that his acceptances had become due.

But if Charlie Devereux took things easy and dallied with the golden moments it was far otherwise with Mr. Furzedon. He anxiously counted every hour that lay between him and the next step in his strange wooing, and no time was lost when the moment arrived for setting in motion the machinery of the law. Legal proceedings against Charlie Devereux followed promptly on the curt intimation that his bill was protested, followed indeed with a promptitude that Charlie little dreamed of. He had written in reply to the notice he had received to say that he would make all arrangements to settle the affair in the course of a few days, but Jordan & Co. paid scant attention to this epistle, but loosed the bloodhounds of the law without more ado.

Devereux was lazily sauntering out of the ante-room one afternoon, when he was encountered by one of his special cronies, a precocious young gentleman, always keenly awake to what was going on around him.

"Hold on, Charlie," he exclaimed, "there are two as suspicious-looking gents as ever I set eyes on anxiously inquiring for you—they are hovering about your quarters, and have got sheriff's officers written in every line of their ugly faces. Stay where you are, old man, if you've any cause to be afraid of such cattle. Just fill your pocket with cigars, and wait till I come back. I'll have my pony round at the back door in ten minutes. If you bucket him into York, you'll catch the evening train easy. Bertie Slade will make it all right for you with the chief, and you can just keep out of the way for a few days while matters are arranged."

He had often pictured to himself something of the kind happening, but all the same the blow came rather like a thunderclap at last. He had thought there would be more

notice ; he had never dreamed of its being all so sudden ; still, Charlie could think of nothing better than what his young counsellor suggested ; he turned back into the ante-room, rang the bell, refilled his cigar-case, sent down to the messman for five pounds' worth of change, and then quietly awaited the upshot of events.

Young Sparshot was back within the time he mentioned. "There's no mistake about it, Charlie," he cried ; "these fellows are thirsting for blood. The pony will be round in two minutes, and don't spare him. You can leave him at the Station Hotel. They'll take care of him there for me. Ah ! here he is ; now, old fellow, slip quietly round the right wing of the barracks. Your quarters, which they are watching, are on the left. If you've luck you'll be through the gate before they know you've gone. At all events, it will be quite your own fault if they catch you. I'll see a portmanteau is sent after you to Limmer's."

Charlie made no reply, but wrung his friend's hand and jumped into the saddle. Five minutes more and a triumphant "Yoicks, gone away," from Sparshot startled the bailiffs on their post, but Devereux was in a hand gallop, and half-way to York before they realised that their prey had escaped them. Arrived there, he found that he had just ten minutes to spare, and, having taken his ticket, thought it prudent to lurk as far as possible in the background ; but he need have been under no apprehension, for nobody appeared likely to interfere with him. And at the appointed time he steps into a first-class carriage, and is whirled away to the metropolis to "make arrangements."

"Making arrangements" is a vague and comprehensive phrase ever on the lips of gentlemen in difficulties ; it seems very easy at the first blush to make arrangements, though when it is sought to put such in practice it is disgusting to find that these brilliant schemes are by no means so easy to carry out. Charlie was in for it now, and at once showed plenty of decision ; he only waited in London till the arrival of his portmanteau, and then at once, retracing his steps, went down to North Leach, to make full confession to his father.

He was aware that his father could lose his temper ; he

had seen him more than once give way to his wrath, but to Charlie he had ever been a kind and indulgent father; even when the lad got into his first money scrape at Cambridge, old Tom Devereux had made comparatively little fuss about it. He had called him a "domned young fule"—Tom's Lincolnshire dialect was apt to get of the broadest when he was excited—but he supposed the young 'uns must have their fling, and that they would kick over the traces a bit. But this time, the old gentleman was very angry; he vowed he would put down no such sum as that to pay for a son's extravagance; he had paid his debts at the University; he had only the other day found a lot of money for his outfit; and, if he had been idiot enough to get sixteen hundred pounds in debt, well, he must just face the consequences. Did the lad think that the brass was so easy to come by as all that? If it had been to start him in any business, well, he might have thought about it, but to pay for his reckless extravagance, not if he knew it! Charlie had got himself into the scrape, and he must get himself out as he best might.

To stay longer at North Leach Charlie felt was dangerous. When his persecutors discovered that he had fled from York his own home was one of the places they would naturally expect him to head for. His father was obdurate; time might soften him, but that was exactly what Charlie had not to spare. A line from Bertie Slade had told him that the Colonel would be as liberal as he could to him in the matter of leave. "But remember, Charlie, that after all only means two or three weeks at the end of that time you will have to give him a definite answer about what you propose to do. I'm sure he will forward your views in every respect, but I own I see nothing for you but to exchange to India, and even that must depend on your being able to make some sort of terms with Jordan & Co. If you think I can be of any use, say so, and I will run up to town and do all I can for you. I should think Jordan & Co., when they find your father won't pay, will meet you in the matter of allowing you to exchange. You see they have always some sort of hold upon you while you are in the army, and if they take that view of the case, well, my uncle, Bob Braddock, can be once more of use to you."

Charlie, who had betaken himself once more to town, was only too delighted to accept Bertie's offer; he was indeed mooning about in a state of the utmost dejection, afraid to show in his usual haunts, and without the slightest idea of what steps he had best take. He had been very loath to appeal to his father, but for all that it had never occurred to him that his father would not eventually come to his assistance. Blown up, pitched into, and abused he had expected to be, but he had fancied that three tempestuous days at North Leach would have brought matters to a satisfactory conclusion. It might perhaps have been better had Lettice been there to plead for him; but she was still in London, and at the end of forty-eight hours, despairing of making any impression on his father's obduracy, he had wended his way back to the metropolis.

Bertie Slade made his appearance in rapid response to Charlie's appeal, and a long conference took place between the pair forthwith.

"It's a deuce of a mess, Charlie, and I'm afraid you'll have to tumble down to infantry," remarked his mentor; "in fact, to get on your feet again you will have to go on your feet. I suppose there's not a chance of the governor melting?"

"Not the slightest," replied young Devereux; "on the contrary, just at present I think he'd be rather pleased to hear I was arrested."

"Well," said his more knowing comrade, "I'm not quite certain that would not be the very best way out of your difficulties; the sternest of parents are wont to relent a bit under such circumstances, and, if they are not in too great a hurry, the most grasping of usurers will get a little anxious to come to terms. The only thing is, that I'm afraid we shouldn't save the commission, and you don't want to cut soldiering, Charlie?"

"No," returned young Devereux, warmly, "I'm not one of those fellows who can turn their hand to anything; I shall never do any good at anything else."

"Well, we've no time to lose," said Bertie. "I'll just walk down and have a talk with my uncle about it, and hear what he has got to say; and then we'll trot down to

the agents, and tell them to look us out an exchange. It will have to be to infantry, though, if we're to make any money out of it. There's deuced little difference between cavalry in India and cavalry at home, just now."

"Anything, so long as I have not to give up the service," rejoined Charlie; "I leave all to you."

So Bertie Slade walked down to the Thermopolium; and, after a little, contrived to come across his uncle.

"Come to grief, already," exclaimed Major Braddock, when he heard the story. "Hang it! I don't like *protégés* of mine going off the rails quite so quick as that. However, it seems, from what you tell me, the boy has done no worse than make a born fool of himself; and the greater part of his folly was committed before he joined. I'm sorry for him, Bertie; for he struck me as a nice young fellow. But you're quite right; there's only one thing for him, and that is, to exchange. He'll get a bit of money to go into a line regiment, and we must turn the screw on his father, and induce him to pay up a bit for him. As for the exchange part of it, you'll probably not want my help. If there is any hitch about it, I'll do what I can. I'll tell you what more I'll do. I'll not only write myself, but I'll write to your chief, and get him also to pen a letter to old Mr. Devereux, urging him to do what he can to save a promising young fellow from having to give up a profession he was made for. Tell the young one to keep up his spirits, and let me know what you've done about the exchange as soon as possible. In the meantime, take my advice, get young Devereux across the water as soon as may be. Let him wait at Boulogne while we arrange matters for him."

As Bertie Slade said, when he got back, "It was worth going to have a talk with Uncle Bob, Charlie. That last tip of his was well worth having; we shall make much better terms with Jordan & Co. when they find that you are beyond their reach."

XXXIII.—SHERE ALI THE DACOIT.

A WIDE sandy plain, out of which huge boulder-rocks crop in various places, with a torrid afternoon sun still blazing fiercely down upon it—traversed, nevertheless, by a broad but well-used highway, not far from the side of which a tope of palm-trees marks the presence of a spring. In this little oasis of the sandy desert was a small encampment, some half-dozen tents in all. From a marquee, standing a little apart from the others, emerges a thick-set, powerful man, clothed in the gray kharkee uniform worn by Her Majesty's troops in India when they mean business—that is to say, it is the dress more especially set aside for campaigning—a pith helmet, around which a puggaree of many folds is twisted, crowned the man's head. For a minute or two he gazed listlessly around, then exclaimed, apparently for the edification of somebody inside the tent—

“Phew! how stifling hot it is—here, get up, you lazy young beggar, the sun is beginning to drop, and in another hour the heat will become endurable. We may as well get the horses and ride on to the edge of this plain. Thank heavens! we shall be across it to-morrow.”

By this time the other denizen of the marquee had made his appearance. Like the first, he is also clothed in gray kharkee, and as he joined his companion remarks, “All right, Hobson, I am good for a ride whenever you like; but I am bound to say this guerilla-hunting is the dullest sport that I ever embarked in. The beggars have no idea of fighting, and they have walked us pretty well off our legs in our endeavours to bring them to book.”

“You are quite right,” rejoined the other, a veteran captain of infantry, who had been marching and fighting all over India for the last twenty years. “It is all nonsense sending foot-soldiers after these chaps; cavalry or mounted infantry are the only people to tackle them; but you make a mistake in one thing, Devereux: you will find these fellows will fight like the very devil if ever we do get them into a corner; but, like all robbers that I have

ever heard of, they naturally don't want to fight if they can help it."

"I suppose," rejoined Charlie Devereux, "this is the chronic state of India, and that our principal employment is the suppression of dacoits, guerillas, or by whatever fancy name these highway robbers think fit to honour themselves."

"Well," rejoined Hobson, laughing, "I won't say but what there is a little of it always going on, but generally not more than the police are able to cope with. What makes them very bad in these parts is this: It is some few years now since the Mutiny, but these fellows are the dregs of that revolt. You see, these are sepoy who were forced to the jungle at that time; their leaders are men we should undoubtedly have hung if we could have laid hands on them at the time; and they no doubt believe we shall do so still; but you need never be afraid in India that you won't see fighting—we have always a little row going on somewhere."

"Oh! I'm not grumbling," rejoined Charlie; "I only regret that our friends in front are so confoundedly long in the leg."

"Well," rejoined Hobson, "I have got one bit of good news for you: In consequence of my strong representation that we were marching our men to death, and are still unable to come up with these fellows, we have made an application to mount a company. If it is only granted, I am to have the command and organizing of it; and, on the strength of your having been through the riding-school, I will take you as one of my subalterns if you like."

"Only too much obliged to you," rejoined Charlie. "By Jove! if we only get leave, we will deuced soon bring these beggars to book then."

"Yes," rejoined Hobson, "it would take a very little whiie to organise them; we have only got to pick out the fellows who can ride a bit, and they would be fit to go anywhere in a month. We don't want them drilled up to Dragoon pattern. Ah! here come the ponies; and now for our afternoon canter."

Some months have elapsed since Charlie Devereux

escaped from his native country. The term "escape" is used advisedly, for escape it was in the most rigid sense of the word. When Major Braddock took a thing in hand he was wont to go into it very thoroughly. He had interested himself about young Devereux in the first instance at Bertie's request, but he took to the boy kindly on his own account: a young gentleman who thus early displayed such delicate perception of the art of dining was sure to win his way to the Major's heart. Major Braddock not only interested himself very much about Charlie's exchange, but he also interposed with some sound advice regarding his affairs. The Major was a man of the world, and had more than once, in his soldiering days, intervened between the usurer and his prey.

"You are very good, I dare say, Bertie; anybody, of course, can manage the young idiot's affairs better than himself; but I understand all this sort of thing better than you do. The first thing is to get him out of the country; when he is safe in India, Jordan & Co. will be very glad to come to terms; of course they must have back the money he actually borrowed, but we will cut down the percentage pretty extensively. Where is he now?"

"In hiding, out at Hampstead," replied Bertie.

"Well, impress on his mind that he must keep very close, and the sooner he is off the better. He ought to be well on to his way to India before he appears in the *Gazette*. The minute they see that, Jordan & Co. will understand our little game, and they are safe to ferret him out if he remains in this country."

In good truth the pursuit of Charlie waxed very hot. Furzedon was ceaseless in urging on his emissaries to effect his arrest. He thought that, armed with this engine, he might be able to carry his point with Lettie. She knew that her brother was in sore trouble, but it would come much more home to her if she learnt that he was actually arrested. Surely, then, she would not hesitate to rescue her favourite brother from the toils of his creditors. Half her world at this minute believed that she was going to marry him, Furzedon. Let her only promise to do so, and he would tear up all these liabilities of Charlie's at once.

Surely, when she heard that he was actually imprisoned, that his future as a soldier would be ruined unless he was speedily released, she would not hesitate. But to put extreme pressure upon her it was absolutely necessary that he should lay Charlie Devereux by the heels, and so far his emissaries had failed to trace him ever since his escape from the barracks at York. Still Furzedon looked upon it as a mere matter of time. Devereux's friends apparently had no intention of coming to his assistance. Not the slightest overture had been made to Jordan & Co. on his behalf from any one, and this was a thing which caused Ralph Furzedon no little satisfaction. People, he knew, did not much care about paying fifteen hundred pounds to rescue a young scapegrace from the results of his own imprudence. Still, if they chose, Furzedon knew very well that either old Tom Devereux or Mrs. Connop could discharge Charlie's liabilities. But one thing Mr. Furzedon had never thought of, and that was his victim exchanging to a regiment on foreign service. He was a man having no knowledge of military matters, and that Charlie Devereux might seek that way of extricating himself from his difficulties never occurred to him, so that when he read in the papers "—th Rifles. Cornet Charles Devereux, from the —th Hussars, to be Ensign, *vice* Rawlins, who exchanges," came upon him like a revelation. Like the American philosopher, he was inclined to exclaim, "Can such things be?" Like Shylock, he was tempted to cry, "Is this law?" but, pulling himself together, he remarked, "My dear Devereux, I am afraid your joining your new regiment will depend upon what answer your charming sister makes to my suit." He had yet to discover, that, when he read Charlie's name in the *Gazette*, that young gentleman was on board a P. and O. steamer, within a very few hours' sail of Malta.

But when Furzedon realised that Devereux had escaped his disappointment was very great. It was not that he bore the slightest animosity to his old college chum—far from it; if he had been working ill to Charlie it was all in furtherance of his cherished design upon Lettice Devereux. He was a man of great tenacity of purpose, not easily to

be turned from the pursuit of any object he had set himself to attain, and unscrupulous as to the means by which he compassed his desire. If he had behaved to Charlie after the manner of his kind, it was solely with the view of bending Lettice to his will. He was not fond of losing money, but it was not that. The disappointment was in the fact that he found himself suddenly deprived of what he considered the strongest card in his hand—and he felt assured that except under pressure of some kind Miss Devereux would never consent to be his bride. It was curious that when he first sought her hand he admired her, but was not at all in love with her, and now, despite the knowledge that he had not found favour in her sight, he was wild to marry her. Such was the man's indomitable will that he did not even yet despair of bringing that about, but he was conscious that a very powerful inducement was now withdrawn from his grasp.

As for Charlie Devereux, it had been with a sad heart that he had steamed out of Southampton Waters. He knew that he ought to consider himself very fortunate to have got out of his scrape so far as well as he had—to have saved the commission was of course a great thing, and as Bertie said to him at parting, "When your affairs have got square, well, you must manage to exchange back to us," and this comforted Charlie not a little, although he knew that it might be by no means easy to accomplish. But he was very sad for all that at leaving his old comrades and the regiment whose gay jacket he had donned so proudly but a few months back. Well, he was young, India was all new to him—and he must just make the best of things. He found his new comrades a right good lot of fellows, and frankly admitted that they were so; but still his sympathies were all with the regiment he had left. A soldier should always believe his own corps to be the very best in the service, and however he may wander about the Army List he usually retains a strong feeling for the regiment in which he first bore the colours.

Then again, there was no doubt that Charlie found his new corps engaged in a most monotonous and depressing duty; for the suppression of these dacoits the corps was

broken up into small divisions. It was really arduous police duty, from which there was no honour to be gained, but of which there was a good deal of roughing it and weary marching, and nothing is more irksome than the pursuit of such light-footed marauders, as the troops engaged in stamping out the embers of the great Mutiny found to their sorrow. Charlie's soldiering at home had been of the sunniest description. Quartered in one of the pleasantest cities in England, with excellent hunting close by, and the metropolis within an easy distance, his experiences had been very different from the monotonous life he was now living; not that he cared about the hard work, but there was a want of excitement about it all that he felt so terribly.

"Never mind, young 'un," said Hobson, when his subaltern indulged in a hearty growl at the dulness of their present existence, "it won't last for ever; these fellows are either getting used up or dispersed, though our detachment has never had the good fortune to come up with them; still, you know, we hunt them into other people's hands, and if you have any luck you will throw in for a very pretty scrimmage yet before it is all over. From what my scouts tell me, we have got a stag royal in front of us—a fellow who was a man of mark in the Mutiny times—one of Tantia Topée's ablest lieutenants, and what is more, he is at the head of a pretty strong band; now that fellow don't want to fight, but you may depend upon it that whoever does come up with him will find him a stiff nut to crack."

"By Jove, this is getting rather exciting," said the other; "of course we shall beat him."

"Oh yes," rejoined Hobson, "we always do, odds or no odds; all I mean is it won't be a walk over."

"So much the better," rejoined Charlie, who like all young soldiers was just a little bloodthirsty; "I am keen to see a little bit of fighting in earnest."

"Well, if we chance to come up with Shere Ali he is safe to indulge you; he is fighting with a rope round his neck; for, though his sins of the Mutiny time might be condoned, yet he has been guilty of too many outrages in the dacoit way since, to hope for pardon."

They rode on now for some time in silence, each immersed in his own thoughts; Hobson gravely considering how he is to get the best of this ubiquitous robber, Shere Ali, upon whose trail you had no sooner got than he speedily vanished, to be heard of only again in some other part of the district. Government had decreed that this man should be stamped out like any other vermin, and the ex-soubahdar most richly deserved it. Since he had proved false to his salt he had shown all that tiger ferocity characteristic of the Asiatic when he gets the upper hand. He had been one of the most ruthless lieutenants of Tantia Topee, and since he had become a leader of dacoits had distinguished himself by the most unrelenting hostility to the Feringee; such Englishmen, and it was whispered even Englishwomen, who had the misfortune to fall into his hands had met with scant mercy. This man's hands, it was known, were as deeply imbued in blood as Nana Sahib's, or any of the other savage chiefs who sprang to the front at the time of the great Mutiny. He was quite aware that there was small hope for him should he fall into the hands of the English, and had vowed to wage a war of implacable hostility against the white men.

Charlie's thoughts, on the contrary, reverted to the old country, and the life he had left behind him. What a fool he had been! What a pleasant career was opened before him but for those miserable gambling debts of his old Cambridge days. He had not heard so often from home as he had expected; and, strangest thing of all, Lettie had never said a word of her approaching marriage. Still, he had also heard from Mrs. Kynaston, and that lady, though alluding to it somewhat vaguely, still quite conveyed the idea that the engagement yet existed; and Charlie, who, bear in mind, was wholly ignorant of the seamy side of Ralph Furzedon's life, saw no reason why, if Lettie fancied him, it should not be. From Bertie Slade he had also heard but briefly, though satisfactorily: "In the end, Charlie," said Bertie, "your affairs, I have no doubt, will be thoroughly arranged; but your father places implicit reliance on my Uncle Bob. Now the Major, you know, is a bit of a martinet, and contends that a decent dose of

purgatory should precede the killing of the fatted calf for the prodigal, 'There is nothing like giving these young sinners a tolerable spell of discomfort before you re-establish them; leave the boy out there for a bit, Mr. Devereux, to enjoy the sport of dacoit-hunting, out of which there is not a laurel to be gathered, but which involves plenty of work and hard knocks. Besides, it will make it all the easier to arrange matters with Jordan & Co. If they think you are ready to settle all your son's liabilities right off they will insist on a settlement in full. If, on the contrary, they see we are in no hurry, they will abate their terms considerably. The longer we wait the less they will take. Let him stay out in India until he gets his lieutenancy, a matter, probably, of two or three years; and then, I think, we shall find Jordan & Co. likely to listen to reason.' It is good sound advice, Charlie, and, though the chiveying of robbers all over the country is not quite our idea of active service, still I can fancy with what a will you'll go for them when you do catch them "

By this time they had reached the edge of the plain, and were now apparently entering a wooded country, at the back of which lay the regular jungle. They were about to dismount from their horses, when "crack" went three or four rifles, and as many bullets whistled past their ears. Instantly Hobson, wheeling his horse about with a cry, "Ride for it, Charlie," set spurs to his horse. Young Devereux followed his example; though, as he did so, he felt something like a hot iron just graze his arm. When he had gone three or four hundred yards Hobson pulled up his horse, and, turning round, deliberately surveyed the spot from whence the fire had come. "By Jove, Charlie," he exclaimed, "we rode right into the wasps' nest, and it is deuced lucky for us, I fancy, that we rather surprised them; if they had only exercised their usual cunning, we should have been either dead or prisoners by this." "See," replied Charlie, "there are about a dozen of the beggars on the edge of the wood looking at us." "Yes," replied Hobson, "it is confoundedly unlucky that we should have come upon them as we did; they will know, of course, that we have soldiers with us, and before we can get back to

camp, or even start, that fellow Shere Ali will have had up sticks and decamped in some other direction. It is thundering unlucky. We really had a chance to come up with him to-night; but, hullo! young man, they have barked you." "Just a graze," replied Charlie, "but nothing of any consequence, but what will you do now?" "Oh! we must just get back to camp as quick as we can, and then start in pursuit of our friends; my only hope is that, by perpetually harrying them, we shall drive Shere Ali straight into the hands of one of the other parties out in pursuit of him;" and with that, Hobson put his horse into a gallop, and the pair made their way back to camp as speedily as might be.

XXXIV.—DOINGS ON THE KNAVESMIRE.

WE must now go back a little bit in this history to see how events have fared with people in England. Gilbert Slade had been very little in London since that famous Derby, which had utterly broke Devereux. He had run up for a week to help Charlie with his advice in the arrangement of his affairs, and he had also come up for a few days to see him off and bid him God-speed on his departure for India, which had taken place about the end of July; otherwise Gilbert Slade had seen nothing of London that year. He had called upon nobody during those brief visits. He was up strictly on business, and had no wish to advertise his presence in the metropolis. He had never made his appearance in Onslow Gardens, nor, sorely to the disappointment of Mrs. Kynaston, had she ever set eyes upon him since that brief visit he paid her in May. With every reason to believe in Miss Devereux's engagement with Furzedon, Bertie had thought it useless to call on Mrs. Connop. Twice he had done so during that Derby week, and upon each occasion had been met with a "not at home." He had come to the conclusion that this was a distinct intimation that they wished to see no more of him. While he was making up his mind,

another had stepped in and carried off the prize. If it had only been any other than Furzedon he could have borne it better, but that, even with all his money, Miss Devereux could marry such a man as that was incomprehensible in Bertie's eyes; but it was all over now, and for the present, as men do under such circumstances, Gilbert Slade thoroughly realised the hollowness of London society. One morning in September, shortly before the Doncaster races, Bertie received a letter from his uncle Norman, in which he said, "I shall be at York this week for a couple of nights I shall stay at the 'Black Swan,' and shall throw myself upon your hospitality for dinner; your regiment has the reputation of doing that sort of thing rather well, and I have no doubt you can make up a rubber for me afterwards. An hotel coffee-room is rather a dull place to put in on an evening alone."

"Give Uncle Norman a dinner! I should rather think so," muttered Bertie to himself on reading this note, "I would put him up for a whole week, and be only too glad to do so; but I am puzzled as to what brings him to York just now. Uncle Norman at York during the races is natural enough, but Uncle Norman at York the second week in September is a mystery." However, whatever might be Norman Slade's object in turning up in the great city of the north, his nephew took care that there should be a note for him at the "Black Swan," saying that he should be only too glad to see him every day during his stay; and that if it would be the slightest convenience he could put him up very comfortably to boot. In due course Norman Slade turned up at the mess of the —th Hussars, and was regarded with due reverence by the younger members of that sporting regiment as a sort of incarnation of all Turf knowledge, and a man who, if he chose, could make wondrous revelations on the subject of races past, present, and to come. When he chose, as we know, Norman could make himself extremely pleasant, and upon this occasion he won golden opinions. The Colonel, in particular, was enchanted with his guest, who manifested the greatest possible interest in the regiment. One thing especially was he curious in, and that was, would he have

an opportunity of seeing the regiment out? Did they not exercise on the Knavesmire in the early mornings at times?

"Yes," replied the Colonel, "but we are out so very early—during this hot weather we begin at seven, and so get our drill over before the heat of the day."

Then," rejoined Norman, "if I am on the Knavesmire sharp seven, I shall be in time to see your fellows exercise."

In plenty of time, Mr Slade," said the Colonel; "indeed, a quarter past will be quite time enough. If you will allow me I will have a horse there all ready for you."

"You are very good," rejoined Norman, "but I have no doubt Bertie can manage all that for me"—to which speech Bertie returned a somewhat bewildered assent.

"Very good, then," replied the Colonel; "and now, Mr. Slade, if you won't take any more wine, what do you say to a rubber and a cigar?"

"I should like it of all things," replied the other, rising. Norman Slade, indeed, had astonished Her Majesty's —th Hussars not a little. Although Bertie had given a hint to the chief and some of his own immediate chums that his uncle was not given to racing talk, they could not believe that a man occupied in such a leading position of the Turf should absolutely abstain from the slightest allusion to that sport, either in the past or in the present; while Bertie on his part was just as much astonished at the extraordinary interest his uncle had suddenly developed in military matters. "I can understand," said Bertie, to one of his chums, "his not talking Turf—he never does—I can understand his preferring a dinner with us and a rubber afterwards to the solitude of the 'Black Swan,' but his wanting to see the regiment out beats me altogether. I never knew my uncle before take the faintest interest in soldiering, and should have just as soon thought of asking him to the regimental ball as to a regimental field-day." However, after a couple of *partis* at whist, Norman Slade rose to take his departure, simply remarking, "These early hours in the morning, Colonel, require several earlier hours at night," and then, thanking his host for a very pleasant evening, Norman Slade stepped into his fly and was driven back to his hotel.

The morning came, and seven o'clock saw the —th Hussars filing through the gate that led on to the Knavesmire; that passed, they formed up, and at once commenced the morning's drill. Bertie's servant with a horse was left at the gate, with instructions to await the arrival of Mr. Slade, who was to drive out from York in a fly. Soon the Hussars were skirmishing, charging, and going through all manner of evolutions, and more than once both the Colonel's and Bertie's eyes wandered about in search of their pleasant guest of the night before. But there was not a sign of Norman Slade, and as they once more filed through the gate—their morning's work over—on their way back to barracks, Bertie's servant assured them that the gentleman had never put in an appearance. It was incomprehensible. It seemed impossible that there could have been any mistake—and yet what could have become of Norman Slade? He was, apparently, most anxious last night to see the regiment out in the morning, and yet, although a horse had been brought there expressly for him, although he had been told the exact time and everything else, he had never put in an appearance; neither the Colonel nor Bertie could perceive how it was possible that a mistake could have occurred. In the course of the morning a note was brought to Bertie in which his uncle said that he was unfortunately prevented coming out to the Knavesmire that morning, and, more unlucky still, that business required him to leave York that morning for the north by the eleven train. "Make my apologies to the Colonel for not turning up this morning, and, if you can, meet me at the station a little before the train starts." It was all very mysterious; however, Bertie at once determined that there was only one thing to be done, and that was to meet his uncle as suggested, and say good-bye to him.

At a quarter before eleven Bertie Slade made his appearance at the York station, where he found his uncle already pacing up and down the platform. "Why, what on earth became of you, Uncle Norman, this morning? we were all on the look-out for you on the Knavesmire, and never saw you." Norman's eyes twinkled at his nephew's

speech. "No," he said, "you were a little late for me. I had gone home before you came."

"What on earth do you mean?" ejaculated the other speaker. "I mean this," said Norman. "I had ascertained that you fellows were given to early drills on the Knavesmire, and I had the best of all possible reasons for wishing to know exactly when you would be there."

"I don't understand," said Bertie.

"Well, my dear boy, *I tried Belisarius for the Leger this morning*, and I didn't want the whole of Her Majesty's—th Hussars to be present at the trial—do you understand now, Bertie?" Bertie's answer was simply a roar of laughter, and then he exclaimed, "Sold us all, by Jove! I hope it was satisfactory?"

"I will say no more, but it is good enough for you to start in a pony with me—they got at the man last time, but I will take deuced good care that they don't this."

"Yes, I heard something about this in London, and, what is more, happened to get at the names of two of the principal winners over the defeat of Belisarius."

"What are their names?" inquired Slade sharply.

"Major Kynaston and a Mr. Furzedon—both men I have met and don't think much of. Didn't you hear a rumour that Bill Smith was given a drugged glass of wine in the Paddock after he got up?"

"Hear the rumour!" exclaimed Norman Slade excitedly. "I saw it done, and, though I don't know him, could swear to the man that gave it. I know all about Kynaston; he is rather a shy card, but I don't think that he will go the length of hoccussing a jockey; besides, I will swear he was not the man who handed the glass to Bill. As for Furzedon, I never saw him—but here is my train—we must have some more talk about this—mind you come to Doncaster."

"All right, uncle, I will come up to see Belisarius have another shy. Furzedon will most likely be there, and, if so, I will point him out to you."

"Do," said Norman, "and if I can work the thing out I will bring the whole case before the Jockey Club. Once more, good-bye," and the two cordially shook hands.

Norman Slade as he sped rapidly back to Bellaton Wold pondered a good over what Bertie had just told him. True, he had seen that fatal glass given to Bill Smith in the Pad-dock at Epsom; had he not interfered and insisted upon drinking a glass out of the same bottle? That wine was not drugged, or he also must have felt the effects of it, and, if Smith in accordance with his besetting weakness had been unable to withstand the temptation of a glass too much, then there would be no call for the interference of the Jockey Club in the matter. An intemperate man had failed to keep sober in order to ride his own horse in the great race of the year, and there was no more to be said. It was of more moment to him, Bill Smith, than any one, and as for the misguided public who chose to pin their faith on a drunken jockey trainer they had only themselves to blame for their exceeding folly.

This time Norman Slade and Sir Ronald had determined not to let the bibulous Bill out of their guardianship. They knew from bitter experience that when once he had broken out and given way to drink he got beyond all control, but that if carefully watched over from the first it was possible to restrain him. It was during that unlucky week when neither Norman Slade nor Sir Ronald had been able to keep guard over him that Bill Smith got so completely out of hand before Epsom, but this time there had been no relaxation of vigilance. Norman Slade had taken up his abode at Bellaton immediately after Goodwood, and Sir Ronald had also been a frequent visitor. Bill Smith had never been left by himself for some weeks past, and, though there was no such golden harvest to be reaped at Don-caster as might have been gathered at Epsom, still both Slade and the baronet had managed to back Belisarius for the St. Leger to win themselves a nice stake, although the racing fraternity knew, that, as far as Smith's horse went, the Derby running was not to be relied on, yet the general public only knew that Belisarius had been well beaten in the big race. Rumours of course there were that his rider had been drunk, but then excuses were always made for a prominent favourite when he failed to realise his expecta-tion, and so, though the bookmakers would offer no great

price against the north-country horse, still, in consequence of the public not fancying him, the odds against him were larger than might have been expected.

Another thing too that still further expanded the price at which Belisarius stood for the great Doncaster race was due in part to accident, and in part to a piece of Turf strategy suggested by Norman Slade. Fearing that the horse-watchers who infested Bellaton Wold should get knowledge of their proceedings, Slade had suggested that the trial of Belisarius just previous to the St. Leger should take place at York, and this manœuvre had been attended with complete success. Belisarius had been tried over the Knavesmire, and acquitted himself to the entire satisfaction of all connected with him, and, what is more, without any of the few spectators being a bit the wiser, they indeed being unaware of what horses they were; whilst there occurred another thing which Slade had not foreseen, namely, that the horse-watchers of Bellaton Wold telegraphed to their employers that Belisarius had not left his stable, which to the racing world meant that there was something amiss with him. When a horse is stopped in his work a week before a big engagement it is usually the presage of his defeat, and consequently it was not surprising that the bookmakers extended their offers against Belisarius. Flushed by the successful issue of the trial, Slade and Sir Ronald took this opportunity of again backing the horse on more favourable terms, the Baronet in particular laying out a considerable sum of money to—as he said—recoup him for his Epsom disappointment; and a few days later saw the little coterie on the Doncaster Town Moor, trusting to see Belisarius redeem his laurels.

The Wednesday dedicated to the great race of the North came at last—saw Bertie Slade and several of his brother officers all bound for Doncaster. “If you fellows want to bet,” said Bertie, “you had better wait till I have seen my uncle, and, if he says Belisarius and his jockey are all right, I think you will find him good enough to have a flutter on!” and it was accordingly settled amongst that little band of Hussars, that, if Norman Slade spoke favourably, they should all indulge in a joint plunge upon that noble

animal. Bertie, indeed, had been unable during the railway journey to resist explaining the cause of his uncle Norman's sudden interest in cavalry manoeuvres. "Couldn't make it out at all," said Bertie; "his military knowledge goes no further than just knowing a horse-soldier from an infantry man"—and then Bertie told his story—which elicited roars of laughter. Arrived at the course, Bertie made his way straight to the Paddock, where, as he rightly conjectured, he found his uncle.

"You will have a good run for your money to-day," said Norman, as they shook hands; "both horse and man are thoroughly fit, and I think you will see that the Two Thousand form was right, and not the Derby."

"All right! Excuse me, I'll be back in a minute, but I promised to let some of our fellows know if you fancied Belisarius."

"Tell them I do," rejoined Norman curtly.

Bertie hurried across the Paddock, and told that little syndicate that had been formed in the train that they might commence operations at once; that his uncle thought Belisarius would about win; that it was the jockey not the horse who lost the race at Epsom, and that this time Bill Smith was sober as the traditional judge. As Bertie made his way back again he met Furzedon, who would have fain stopped and spoken, but Bertie passed him with a nonchalant nod, and rejoined his uncle.

"I told you Furzedon would be at Doncaster. I have just met him. I will point him out to you presently."

"Ah, do," replied Norman Slade. "I should like to see him. Bill Smith still sticks to it that last glass of wine he had was drugged. He admits he was the worse for liquor, but declares that he was hoccussed to boot. Now, I know he was drunk and that the wine in that bottle was not doctored, for I drank a glass of it. Of course it does not follow that there was not something dropped into Smith's glass, but I cannot prove it."

"Surely some of the gang with the giver of that last glass were privy to it if it was so?"

"No doubt," said Norman; "but I don't know how to get at them."

"Whenever a lot of scoundrels have been engaged in a transaction of this sort one of them is safe to turn Queen's evidence," said Bertie. "The story is safe to come to your ears before long but here comes our man. That's Furzedon, Uncle Norman."

"By Heavens, the very fellow; that's the man who handed Bill Smith the glass of wine in the Epsom paddock ——"

"And was one of the largest winners over the defeat of Belisarius," commented Bertie.

XXXV.—THE ST. LEGER.

SPURRED on by his hatred of Furzedon, Mr. Prance has been untiring in his endeavours to unravel the whole history of Belisarius's defeat at Epsom; or, to speak more properly, of the drugging of Bill Smith, which led to it. The story was current enough amongst the lower order of professional racing-men; and Prance had, with some little trouble, got at the names of the very men who had been employed to ply the reckless jockey with liquor. It was not difficult to scrape an acquaintance with them, and Prance speedily ascertained that they conceived themselves to have been by no means liberally dealt with by Furzedon, and were quite willing to tell all they knew to any one who would make it worth their while. This question of money, however, put an insurmountable bar to further investigation for the present, although Mr. Prance anticipated no difficulty about procuring the requisite funds when he should deem it expedient to launch his thunderbolt against the object of his detestation. He was quite aware that he must get hold of somebody of standing and position to bring forward such a charge as this. No one would even listen to such a story from the lips of a nameless vagrant like himself; and he thought that whoever he induced to take up the case would make no demur to find-

ing the necessary funds to unloose the tongues of his witnesses. He had, in the first instance, fixed upon Sir Ronald Radcliffe as the instrument of his vengeance. He knew that the Baronet had lost a considerable sum by the overthrow of Belisarius; and his status as a racing-man made him a very fit person to take up the case. He had found no difficulty in obtaining access to Sir Ronald; for, like Major Kynaston, that sporting gentleman was accustomed to receive strange visitors; but the interview had proved by no means satisfactory.

"I don't believe your story," rejoined the philosophical and somewhat cynical Baronet. "You say you have witnesses who demand to be paid before they will testify. As Shakespeare hath it, 'that makes against you;' but, secondly, we'll suppose it all true, what the devil does it all matter to me? The race was lost, and our money has been paid. Whether Bill Smith was drunk, or drugged, or both, makes but little difference. Pooh! my good fellow, I'm not going to trouble myself with unearthing a dead scandal like this. Your best chance is to try and drive a bargain with a sporting newspaper; it might suit them to buy it all up as copy for the dead season, now fast approaching. That will do, my good fellow! Your narrative has no interest for me." Mr. Prance walked down the staircase of Sir Ronald's house considerably depressed in spirits. He had counted confidently on the Baronet at once taking up the case hotly. He forgot that Sir Ronald had no personal vengeance to gratify, and that the race was, as he says, a thing of the irrevocable past, the which there was no undoing; and now Mr. Prance was non-plussed to whom to apply. He knew Norman Slade by name; but Norman was a man who was seldom a prominent figure on a racecourse. He passed most of his time in the Paddock, and was given to looking on at a race from the trainers' stand—inner precincts which impecunious vagabonds like Prance are not privileged to enter. He had had a tolerably successful year, and, in consequence, was in possession of more money than usual; still it was a firm part of his scheme that his vengeance should be carried out at some one else's expense; and when Mr.

Prance arrived at Doncaster he by no means saw his way towards this.

He was wandering vaguely down the course, trying to make up his mind as to whether he should invest his stake on Belisarius, whom two or three of his fraternity had informed him would be sure to reverse the Epsom running. More prudent, he thought to wait till he saw Bill Smith in the saddle and could assure himself that the jockey was fit to ride, when suddenly his eye fell on a cardboard ticket close to his feet. Mr. Prance at once pounced on it—it was probably, he thought, an admission to the Stand; he was not far wrong, but instead of the Stand it was a ticket for the Paddock. Most racing-men are more or less superstitious, and Prance hailed this bit of luck as a good augury, and without more ado made his way to that privileged enclosure which of late years he had never penetrated. It was the very thing he wanted. He would doubtless see Bill Smith inside, as well as the horse, and be able to judge for himself of their condition. Once inside the Paddock Prance had no difficulty in finding what he wanted. Belisarius was walking up and down, and round him were gathered a little knot, two of whom Prance at once recognised. One was the famous north-country jockey, and upon this occasion there could be no doubt that he was in a very different state from that in which he had appeared at Epsom; the other was Sir Ronald Radcliffe; the remainder of the group were unknown to Prance, though the keen, dark, saturnine features of Norman Slade were not easy to forget by any one who had once seen them. Mr. Prance's mind was at once made up upon one point, to wit, that Belisarius was worth backing to-day; but, as the saddling-bell had not yet rung, there was plenty of time for that, and Mr. Prance took advantage of his good fortune to inquire the names of such notabilities as were unknown to him by sight; most especially anxious, for example, to know all those in that group of which Bill Smith was the centre. There were plenty of people there who could tell him who Norman Slade was, and Prance became at once deeply interested in that gentleman. Could this be the man he was looking for?

"It is a stern, unforgiving face," thought Prance; "a man little likely to forgive those who had done aught to his detriment." He never recollected having seen him before, but he had heard him spoken of; he knew that he was a great supporter of Bill Smith, and he further knew that he was a loser over the Derby. Perhaps he could induce this Mr. Slade to take up the case against Furzedon. At all events he must try, for he could think of no one else now that Sir Ronald had failed him. However, it would be time enough to think of all this after the race. If there should be no opportunity, as was most likely, of telling Mr. Slade the whole story at Doncaster, he would doubtless be enabled to obtain access to him in London. At all events, he would find out where he lived, and whether he was willing to help him wreak his vengeance on Furzedon. Mr. Prance was a man of decision; he dashed out of the Paddock, and, making his way to the outer ring, at once made his investment on Belisarius, and then sought some coign of vantage from which to see the race. The St. Leger of that year only proved to the backers of Belisarius how their money had been thrown away at Epsom, and the story of the race may be told in very few words. Bill Smith on his favourite battle-ground, and upon this occasion strictly sober, occupied a prominent position all the way up to the Red House turn, and no sooner was he round that than he took his horse to the front, was never again reached, and landed Belisarius a winner by good three lengths.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Prance, as he jumped off the rough stand, for the occupation of a foot-hold on which he had been mulcted of the sum of one shilling, "If that don't make Sir Ronald and Mr. Slade feel heavenly, I don't know what will. When they think of all the money that ought to have gone into their pockets last May, and remember that it went out instead, they must surely feel rather wolfish about it, and be hungry to punish the man who hocused their jockey. Mr. Slade, at all events, don't look one of the forgiving sort."

No sooner had he been paid his winnings than Prance once more repaired to the Paddock with the object of

getting speech with Norman Slade, which he thought, the big race being satisfactorily got through with, would be now easy to accomplish. The racecourse, as Mr. Punch once observed of the hunting field, "brings people together who would *not otherwise meet*," and certainly affords opportunity to such men as Prance to address their betters if they can only come across them, and this the fortunate finding of the Paddock ticket had placed within that worthy's power. Bill Smith's triumph had been received with very moderate cheering, and not with that "Yorkshire roar" with which the big county was wont to proclaim the victory of the North over the South country horses. Too many of the Tykes had suffered over the Epsom business to feel much enthusiasm about the success of Belisarius on the Town Moor, and Bill Smith was not a little nettled at missing the ovation which usually greeted his winning the St. Leger. Even the impassive Sir Ronald could not suppress a groan as he thought of that lost opportunity on Epsom Downs.

The baronet, however, having congratulated Bill Smith on his victory, speedily returned to the Grand Stand to chat over the race with his friends, and speculate on the following events, and this gave Prance the opening he wanted. He did not wish to speak before Sir Ronald, but no sooner was the baronet's back turned than he walked up to Norman, and touching his hat said, "Can I have a word with you, Mr. Slade?"

Accustomed to be addressed on a racecourse not unfrequently by persons of whom he had no knowledge, Norman replied curtly, "All right, what is it?"

"You saw what won to-day, sir. You know what ought to have won at Epsom."

"If you have merely to tell me that Belisarius ought to have won the Derby, but didn't, because his jockey was drunk, you are a little behind-hand with a well-known story. All the world's known that for some time."

"Bill Smith was more than drunk, sir; he was drugged. You know the man that did it, for I'm told you saw it done."

"I saw him give that last glass of wine in the Paddock

—if you mean that. I suspected it might be so, and I insisted on having a glass out of the same bottle. I know it was not changed, for I never took my eye off it—that wine was not drugged!”

“Not the wine you drank, sir, but the wine Bill Smith drank was! They didn’t change the bottle, but they did the glass,”

“You know that? You can prove what you assert?”

“I can prove it, sir,” replied Prance. “This Furzedon was one of the heaviest layers against Belisarius for the Derby. I can bring you the men he employed to make Smith drunk, but at the last moment his nerve failed him, and he was afraid that would not be sufficient to prevent the horse winning. He ordered them to drug him besides, but they were afraid to do that, and so at the last moment he was compelled to do the hocusing himself. Of course they were with him, and helped him, and saw the phial emptied into the glass. Surely, sir, such a robbery as this ought to be exposed!”

A queer smile flitted around Slade’s mouth as he replied, “And these friends of yours would be willing to give evidence confirmatory of all this, I presume?”

“Certainly they would, if they thought there was any probability of the case being taken up; but they are poor men, Mr. Slade.”

“Ah! and don’t speak unless they are paid for it,” interrupted Norman, sharply. “Now, sir! first of all, what’s your name? and secondly, why do you come to me at this time of day?”

“To begin with, my name is Prance, and secondly, it took me a long time to collect the proofs of what I only suspected.”

“Good!” rejoined Slade, “it looks a little to me as if you and your confederates, having made all that you possibly could out of a successful conspiracy, are now exceedingly anxious to put the coping-stone on your villany by selling your employer.”

“I give you my word, Mr. Slade, that I had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing about what was being done till after the race,” rejoined Prance, earnestly,

"Then what the deuce is your object in coming to me?" said Norman, sharply.

For a second Prance hesitated, then, as an almost demoniacal expression spread across his countenance, he hissed between his teeth:

"I *hate* Furzedon!"

Slade looked at him for a moment, and then exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "By heaven, he is speaking the truth now."

"Yes!" continued Prance, in a voice hoarse with passion, "you gentlemen think that we poor devils care for nothing but money; but there's one thing that comes far before money to most men—revenge! Furzedon has ruined me! struck me! desolated my home! and for years I have lived only to be revenged upon him!—"

"That will do for the present," replied Slade, quietly; "if you can prove what you say, and I take this case up, I think, socially speaking, you will about attain your end."

"Yes," replied Prance, "and I have a good deal more to tell you about him than that. He passes in the world as a wealthy, well-to-do gentleman; in reality he is only a money-lender."

"Give me your address," rejoined Slade, and as he spoke, Norman took his betting-book from his pocket, and carefully noted down Mr. Prance's town residence. "I have no time to go into the matter here, but I will write to you in London, and if I am satisfied with the proofs you produce, and that your story is *bona fide*, I think I can at all events promise you that Mr. Furzedon will be warned off the Turf, and be no longer received in decent society."

"Thank you, sir," and touching his hat, Mr. Prance accepted his dismissal, and with an exultant heart vanished into the crowd.

As for Norman Slade he paced up and down in the Paddock, revolving the whole story in his mind for some minutes. He had vowed if he could get proof of this thing to follow up the matter to its bitter end, and here was proof ready to his hand, if Prance's tale was to be trusted. This scoundrel Furzedon, moreover, was figuring in society, and had actually forced an acquaintance upon Bertie

Slade, his—Norman's—nephew. Now it was high time the disguise was torn off this impostor. This fraudulent money-lender should be shown up in his true colours, and, if he was beyond the reach of the ordinary law, he was still open to the judgment of the Turf Senate, and if when the facts were brought before them they should think fit to pass sentence, Mr. Furzedon would find that there were malpractices in racing that could not be committed with impunity.

XXXVI.—SINISTER RUMOURS.

CHARLIE'S exile is a source of sore trouble to Lettie Devereux, and of infinite mortification to her aunt. They both, perhaps, unduly exulted at that young scape-grace's appointment to the —th Hussars. They had been so proud of their young Dragoon! and now that was all over! He was in a far country, engaged in what was apparently little better than police-work. Mrs. Connop, indeed, had been so melted by what she called the misfortunes of her favourite nephew that she had been ready to contribute very handsomely towards extricating him from his difficulties; if her brother would furnish two-thirds of the requisite money, she would find the remainder; but old Tom Devereux, taking counsel from shrewd and worldly Major Braddock, was obstinate. Charlie had made his own bed, and must lie on it. Major Braddock was by no means averse to welcoming a return of the prodigal in due season; but what he did object to was a premature mincing of veal in his behalf.

"No such schoolmaster as experience!" quoth the Major. "Let him feel thoroughly for a time the change of position his folly has cost him. Let him discover what slow work chevying dacoits is compared to a gallop with the York and Ainsty! and, by the Lord! sir, let him know the difference of living on his rations and dinner at the mess of his old regiment."

So Lettie had to make up her mind that a long time

would pass before she should see her favourite brother again. That he was dissatisfied with his lot she felt certain, although there was not the slightest complaint in any one of his letters; but there was a want of "go" in his correspondence very different from the bright, cheery epistles of yore; very different from the letters he had written from the University, or those he penned when he first joined his regiment at York. Once only had he been betrayed into impatience of his present life, and that was when he said "that he only wished that he had better work to do than that he had been employed in." Another thing, too, which considerably discomposed Miss Devereux was that Gilbert Slade seemed to have totally disappeared from her ken. She not only never met him, she never even heard of him now. She was back again at North Leach, and, indeed, had been for some time; but how different it all was from the winter before! when Charlie was looking forward to joining his regiment at York, and bringing back Bertie Slade with him to wind up the season by a last fortnight with the Brocklesby; and then Lettie thought the world was getting very dull, as we all do when things don't run quite in accordance with our desires, and finally resolved that she would ride across and see Kate Kynaston, for the Kynastons had once more taken The Firs for the hunting season; and, though there had been a relaxing of that great friendship which had suddenly sprung up between that lady and herself, still, strange to say, a common trouble had once more drawn them together. Mrs. Kynaston had schemed and plotted successfully—she had succeeded in detaching Gilbert Slade altogether from Miss Devereux but she had also unluckily lost touch of him herself. She had failed to realise that both she and Lettie owed in great measure their intimacy with Bertie Slade chiefly to his being a brother officer of Charlie's, and that now that youthful cornet had disappeared from the scene they heard no more of Gilbert's movements. Both ladies thought—and Lettie with good reason—that she for her own sake would have proved sufficiently attractive to ensure seeing and hearing a good deal of him, while Kate Kynaston's vanity enabled her to take a similar view of the situation.

Miss Devereux wondered whether the rumour that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Furzedon had anything to say to Gilbert Slade's persistent avoidance of her—avoidance was perhaps hardly the right term, for he had certainly tried twice to see her during the Derby week. Still, he could have managed to meet her easily enough had he wished it; he could have found plenty of excuses for writing to her; but no, from the week he had paid those two bootless visits to Onslow Gardens Gilbert Slade had given no sign of his very existence. She knew how persistently the story of her engagement had been circulated; of the shameful persecution—for it amounted to that—she had been subjected to by Mr. Furzedon. Was it not possible this infamous falsehood had been brought designedly to Gilbert Slade's ears, and would not that account for his never coming near her?

She might have been more disposed to accept this theory but for Mrs. Kynaston, who was continually impressing upon her that in affairs of the heart soldiers were not to be put faith in. A great propounder of the doctrine that "he loves and rides away" was Mrs. Kynaston, but then, just now, she had a purpose to serve, and she was relentless in her determination to crush out any feeling for Gilbert Slade that might be lurking in Miss Devereux's bosom. True, Mrs. Kynaston was not forwarding her own flirtation in any way. And, what was more, although that lady had not in the least abated her caprice for Gilbert Slade, she was utterly nonplussed as regards further pursuit of it. It was not likely that the fiction of Lettie's engagement to Mr. Furzedon could be much longer kept up; and Mrs. Kynaston had only the other day been compelled to write that gentleman a stinging rebuke for what she denominated his ill-advised audacity. Persistent in his determination to marry Miss Devereux, Furzedon had actually written to her father, and volunteered a visit to North Leach; but, upon hearing this, Lettie blazed out indignantly—

"It can't be, father! it *mustn't* be! He has asked me to marry him, and he won't take 'No' for an answer. Already he has spread abroad the report that I am engaged to him. His proposing this visit is all a part of his scheme. It

would give an air of truth to the rumour. If he were a gentleman he would cease from persecuting me. My 'No!' was not only said clearly and distinctly to start with, but has been quite as decisively repeated."

"Say no more, Lettie! If he is distasteful to you, my girl, he sha'n't come to North Leach. But as he is an old friend of Charlie we must make some civil excuse."

Although in the first instance Mrs. Kynaston had been the suggester and promoter of Furzedon's suit, yet now that she had attained her end she had become a very half-hearted ally. She began to see now that nothing was likely to shake Lettie's determination; and, though such a marriage would have suited her very well, she was getting very doubtful of its ever being brought about. Mrs. Kynaston had always a shrewd eye to the future. She liked wealthy friends, and Mr. and Mrs. Furzedon would have been always sure to have a pleasant house where she could claim a welcome. She had seen so many young women say "No" in the first instance to wealthy wooers, and afterwards change their minds, that she thought it might be so with Miss Devereux; but she thought so no longer, and considered that any such decided step on Mr. Furzedon's part—as volunteering himself to North Leach—might rend aside that flimsy fiction of his engagement, which it, for the present, suited Mrs. Kynaston to maintain.

She had told Mr. Furzedon that perseverance is all very well, but that it must be accompanied by tact. Given that, as long as a woman is unwed no man need despair of winning her for a wife; and then Mrs. Kynaston, her platitudes got done with, relieved her own disappointment by administering as many pin-pricks to the rather pachydermatous Furzedon as she could compass.

In pursuance of her resolution Miss Devereux cantered over to The Firs, and found Kate Kynaston both at home and a prey to that unmitigated boredom which is apt to steal over sparsely-populated country neighbourhoods with the last days of the hunting season; when the hot sun and bleak nor'-easter have so dried up the ground that there is no scent; when those on one side the cover are shivering while those on the other are mopping the per-

spiration from their brows, and a general feeling obtains that sylvan scenes and amusements are played out for the present. Mrs. Kynaston welcomed her visitor warmly. She was in that state of *ennui* and depression that makes even the appearance of one's pet antipathy a subject of rejoicing, so that she was most unfeignedly glad to see Lettie.

"How good of you to come!" she exclaimed. "I was just wondering what I should do with myself. The country has grown so *triste*, and I am positively pining for London."

"I don't think you have much cause for complaint," rejoined Miss Devereux, "not but what I quite agree with you that it is a dull time with us; still, two or three weeks will see you out of it."

"Yes; and I believe it's nothing but sheer perversity on Dick's part that makes us stay even that long. He insists upon staying for Lincoln races; declares he's going to win a hunters' flat race there. What a jolly party we were there two years ago.

"Yes," said Lettie; "poor Charlie, how mortified he was at being—as he said—gammoned out of the race by the Walkers. It was a bitter pill for him having to leave the —th Hussars; but I verily believe having to part with Pole Star caused him as much grief as anything."

"Yes, I dare say. It's sad to think of, my dear, but I fancy the laureate knew what he was writing about. It is rather humiliating—

'Something nearer than his dog,
Not so dear, quite, as his horse.'

But the noble animal does come first, I'm afraid, with these hard riders. When Mrs. Morrison got such a nasty fall last year they say her husband's first anxious inquiry was, 'Is the mare much hurt?'

"I won't have Charlie compared to a brute like Mr. Morrison," said Lettie, laughing; "besides, that couple are very well matched. If he had come to grief I can quite fancy her making the like inquiry. Shall you go to Lincoln with the Major?"

"No; it's no fun by myself in that way. I wish you would come."

"We've none of us any heart for it this year," replied Lettie. "Mother is quite convinced that she will never see Charlie again, and he was her favourite, you know; and even father, I believe, is sorry now that he didn't pay all that money, sooner than Charlie should have had to exchange."

"The old story," said Mrs. Kynaston, meditatively. "Fathers are so fond of playing the relentless parent to start with, forgetting they are usually unfitted for the *role*; besides, 'the cutting off with a shilling' is quite out of fashion now-a-days. Do you ever hear anything of Mr. Slade, or any of Charlie's old friends?"

"I know nothing of Mr. Slade, and haven't seen him for more than a year. Of Mr. Furzedon—who, I suppose, must be included in that list—I have seen a good deal too much, though not lately. I have come to detest that man."

"Which is hard," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, "considering how he has striven to produce an opposite result. No," she continued, as Miss Devereux made an impatient gesture of dissent, "I am going to advocate his cause no longer; but what you call his persecution many women would regard as a proof of the sincerity of his love. There's much truth in the old adage, and 'faint heart never *did* win fair lady.' I suppose there are women who from very weariness yield at last to man's pertinacity."

"Poor weak creatures! But I am made of sterner stuff. I don't like Mr. Furzedon, and I never shall. And you may call it what you like, but his still pursuing me with his addresses I regard as persecution."

"Well it's a persecution that most girls look upon with a lenient eye," retorted Mrs. Kynaston, who, although declaring that she could no longer advocate Furzedon's cause, and who in her heart was quite convinced that it was hopeless, still never could resist giving him such support as came to her hand.

"Do you know," said Lettie, "that there has rather a curious thing happened about Mr. Furzedon lately?"

"No," replied her companion, "and if anything of im-

portance had happened to him, I fancy Dick would have heard of it."

"I had a letter the other day from my aunt, Mrs. Connop, which has mystified me a good deal. She says she had a few lines from Mr. Slade, who tells her that Mr. Furzedon has got involved in a very serious scrape; whether he has told her of what nature or not I don't know, she at all events does not tell me, but as far as I can make out, the gist of Mr. Slade's letter appears to be that the less we see of Mr. Furzedon the better."

"You mean to say, Lettie," said Mrs. Kynaston, eagerly, "that he has done something which would oblige his acquaintance dropping him, because Mr. Slade's letter means *that* or nothing."

"It is putting things rather strongly perhaps, but that is pretty much what I make out of Aunt Sarah's letter. Mr. Slade no doubt imagines that Mr. Furzedon is a constant visitor in Onslow Gardens."

"Instead of being merely anxious to be one," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston. "Well, never mind, I'll not allude to all that, but you do surprise me. Mr. Furzedon is such a shrewd self-possessed person I should have thought him the last man likely to get into an awkward scrape. By the way, Mr. Slade might have vouchsafed me a hint as well as Mrs. Connop. Mr. Furzedon is always at our house when we're in town. He and Dick are partners in racing matters. It can't be anything of that sort, surely," continued Mrs. Kynaston, thoughtfully.

"I know no more than I have told you," replied Lettie, "but I don't quite share your opinion of Mr. Furzedon. I'll quite admit that he is too shrewd and sensible to get into what's called a scrape, but I can quite imagine him capable in pursuit of his own schemes of what the world would call a crime," and Lettie thought bitterly of how Furzedon had proposed to purchase her hand by the payment of her brother's debts.

Mrs. Kynaston eyed her visitor keenly. The same thought had once or twice occurred to herself; she was too shrewd a judge of human nature not to have detected long ago that Furzedon was a very unscrupulous man; she had

dismissed the thought as soon as it occurred to her with the reflection that after all this was an acquaintance of her husband. She had been told to be civil to him, and that Dick Kynaston was quite competent to take care of himself; she felt very curious to know what this cloud was that was hanging over Furzedon; but it was quite evident that Lettie knew no more whatever Mrs. Connop might do. In the meantime it was possible that the Major would be able to solve the mystery when she should ask him about it.

"I will ring for my horse now, if you will allow me," said Miss Devereux, "and I will let you know whenever the Furzedon mystery clears up; for the present, good-bye! and remember, you have only two or three weeks' dulness before you, while, as for poor me, I am planted here till it pleases Aunt Sarah to send for me!" and with a shrug of her shoulders, indicative of much disgust, Lettie Devereux took her departure.

XXXVII.—MAJOR KYNASTON'S VISITOR.

WHEN Major Kynaston came home that evening, his wife at once informed him of what Miss Devereux had told her; but the Major was even more astonished than his wife, and professed himself perfectly unable to guess what scrape Furzedon had possibly got into. He quite agreed with his wife that Furzedon was about the last man he should have expected to come to grief in any way.

"He is as sharp as a needle, Kate, has plenty of money, and knows how to take care of it. He don't overrate his game at anything, and there is no man in London better able to take care of himself on the racecourse or at the card-table; *he's* not likely to come to harm; and, though it's going rather far to say that a man of his age is proof against the fascination of your sex, I can only think Furzedon's a fish that would take a deal of catching."

"But think, Dick, is there no Turf transaction in which he was engaged this year, in which his conduct might be called—well, shady?"

"None that I know of," rejoined the Major. "He's no fool; but I don't think he would do anything—to put it broadly—that could be laid hold of."

"Stop, Dick! What was the biggest *coup* you and he made last year? The Derby, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but Furzedon won a good deal more money than I did over it. He laid against the favourite to an extent I didn't dare, and got rather nervous about it."

"Just so; and wasn't there some story about the jockey who rode Belisarius being drugged?"

"Yes; there always are all sorts of *canards* about when a favourite is beaten for a big race. Drugged," continued Dick Kynaston; "well, as far as taking about a bottle of brandy before he got up, I suppose Bill Smith was. He had been on the drink ever since he won the 'Two Thousand,' and it was the knowledge of that led us to bet against him. Furzedon, who, as I said before, went deeper into it than I did, had a tout down at Epsom to watch him, just as you would watch a horse; and it was his reporting that Bill Smith was never sober induced him to lay so heavily against the horse."

"Then, you don't believe the story of this drugged glass that was handed him in the Paddock?" remarked Mrs. Kynaston.

"Certainly not," rejoined the Major. "Don't think Bill Smith required anything of that sort, he rendered himself incapable in a legitimate way. There are plenty of other ways a man may come to grief, Kate."

"Quite so," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston; "and, I suppose, if it's true that Mr. Furzedon is in trouble, it is from a cause we should never dream of."

"If there really is anything in the rumour, you may depend on it we shall soon hear—rather a bore if it's a big scandal," continued Dick, "because we have been rather intimate with him of late; and I have been mixed up in a good many business matters with him."

"Yes; as you say, it would be a little awkward; it always is when one's intimates turn out disreputable or adventurers. However, we shall doubtless soon know all about it, if there is anything to know."

Dick Kynaston upon this occasion went to Lincoln unaccompanied by his wife, and returned in high spirits, his speculations having proved eminently successful. As had been arranged, the races over, the Kynastons at once took their departure for London, and Miss Devereux was left in the seclusion of North Leach, to make the best of eastern county spring time, and anxiously await her aunt's invitation to visit her in Onslow Gardens. "Surely," thought Lettie, "Mr. Slade will feel himself bound to call, after writing that line of warning to Aunt Sarah." And then she wondered whether that warning had not been intended for her. It was very possible Gilbert had heard that she was engaged to Mr. Furzedon, and was desirous of giving her a hint of that gentleman's character before it was too late. From what she knew of Gilbert Slade, he was not at all the man to indulge in reckless gossip about his fellows. She felt sure he would never have written to Mrs. Connop in this wise without very substantial ground to go on. And then Lettie, as she turned the subject once more in her mind, whispered to herself "he surely must care a little about me, or he would never have interfered;" for, by this time, Miss Devereux had quite convinced herself that it was in her special behoof that Gilbert had written to her aunt. How she did wish that she could see that letter! Not that she supposed there was any mention of her in it; but she was very curious to see exactly what Mr. Slade had said. At present she could not be sure whether this guarded reticence was Mrs. Connop's or his. She was destined to read that letter some little time later with mingled feelings of pleasure and annoyance. In the meantime the Kynastons had duly settled in Mayfair for the season, and the Major had also received a letter which puzzled him pretty nearly as much as Gilbert Slade's did Miss Devereux. Dick Kynaston's note was from the uncle, and the fact of Norman Slade writing to him *at all* astonished the Major not a little. When they had met, racing, Kynaston had more than once endeavoured to improve the slight acquaintance he had had with him; but Norman was a very different man to know, unless you happened to suit his fancy—the last man upon whom it was possible to

force an acquaintance ; and, as we know, he had conceived a dislike to the Major the very first time he met him. The note was very formal and very short ; it commenced, " Dear sir," and briefly inquired when it would suit Major Kynaston to see the writer on a matter of business. Dick, of course, replied naming a day upon which he would be at home, and then consulted his wife as to what business it was possible Norman Slade could want to see him about. Mrs. Kynaston read the letter attentively, and then exclaimed—" I am right, Dick ; it's some Turf scrape that Mr. Furzedon has got into. Mr. Norman Slade is a great racing-man, is he not ? "

The Major nodded assent.

" You are known to be Furzedon's Turf partner, and you may depend upon it he went a good deal further than you know of about that Derby. There's a storm brewing, Dick, and I am afraid some of the mud likely to be stirred up will come our way."

" Rather rough if it should, but the Derby business took place as I told you the other day, and I don't believe Norman Slade wants to see me about anything connected with racing. More likely some young fellow has got into a mess about bills, and he wants my advice about it—his nephew the Hussar, I shouldn't wonder."

Mrs. Kynaston's heart gave a jump as she thought of Bertie Slade in trouble and coming to them for advice and assistance. That would afford many delightful opportunities of prosecuting the flirtation for the forwarding of which she had so patiently schemed, and enable her to complete the subjugation of that errant Dragoon ; for that, given sufficient opportunity, any man could resist her fascinations was an idea that never crossed Kate Kynaston's mind. She had a wild caprice to install Bertie Slade as chief cavalier-in-waiting, and had allowed her feelings to run riot as far as he was concerned. What had been caprice was now dangerously near a mad infatuation, and Mrs. Kynaston had neither love for her husband nor much principle to stand to her should the hour of need come. A day or two later, and Norman Slade was duly ushered into

Kynaston's *sanctum* and welcomed with great cordiality by the Major.

"Don't know what brings you here, Slade, but I'm very glad to see you; and now you have found us, I hope, although it is your first, it will be by no means your last visit."

"I have called, Major Kynaston," replied Norman, with a slight inflection on the "Major," "to acquaint you with a very unpleasant circumstance, which, as it indirectly concerns you, ought to be made known to you. Mr. Furzedon is your racing partner, I believe."

"He is," replied the Major shortly.

"Are you aware what his business is?" asked Slade.

"I never heard he had one," replied Kynaston with unfeigned surprise.

"And yet you are credited with knowing the ins and outs of London life pretty well."

"What has that got to do with it?" replied the Major testily.

"Mr. Furzedon is a money lender on an extended scale," said Norman with an amused smile. "He does business under the name of Jordan & Co."

"What!" exclaimed the Major, "do you mean to tell me that Ralph Furzedon is Jordan & Co., the swell pawnbrokers?"

"Just so," replied Slade.

"Well," said the Major, "it takes a good deal to astonish Dick Kynaston, but he's fairly gravelled this time," and then, to Norman Slade's astonishment, the Major burst into a peal of laughter.

What could the man mean? for Slade felt sure that Kynaston spoke the truth when he declared his ignorance of Furzedon's carrying on business as Jordan & Co. Norman had experience in his Turf life of many shady characters, but he would have considered the discovery that one of his intimate friends was a professional money-lender by no means a thing to laugh at. But Dick Kynaston was struck with the cool cynicism of Furzedon, as the man about town, recommending his spendthrift associates to apply for relief to Jordan & Co., *alias* Furzedon, and how that he

(the Major) had been unconsciously made to serve that gentleman's interests. However, a revulsion speedily took place, and Kynaston grasped the fact that his astute young partner had been making a fool of him. No man arrived at this situation but feels angry with the originator of it, and it was not with a little *hauteur* the Major replied :

"I have been unable, Mr. Slade, to help laughing at Furzedon's amazing impudence, but you can't suppose he would have ever crossed my threshold as a friend, nor been received by my wife, if I had had the slightest knowledge of his occupation. On a racecourse, as you know, we mix with strange acquaintances."

"Yes," said Norman; "but I think you will admit his acquaintance, even there, is highly detrimental. I am about to bring a very grave charge against Mr. Furzedon before the Jockey Club; against him remember, not you, though, as his racing partner, it is right you should have early notice of it."

The Major was listening with the greatest attention.

"I shall charge Mr. Furzedon with hoccussing the jockey of Belisarius in the Derby just before the race."

"Absurd!" interrupted the Major. "Bill Smith required no hoccussing, he was drunk, as all the world knows——"

"I have nothing to do with whether he required it," sneered Norman; "if he did not there was the less cause for Mr. Furzedon to commit unnecessary crime. That he did I can and shall prove. I suspected it at the time, and learnt it as a fact last year at Doncaster."

"And why was the charge not brought forward then?" said Kynaston.

"Simply because I was unable to collect the evidence before the racing season terminated, and there has been no quorum of the Jockey Club to bring the case before since."

"I know there was some rumour of this kind current last May, but I never heard Furzedon's name connected with it. I always regarded it as an idle *canard*. You know very well, if a favourite does not run up to his form in a big race, there's generally a whisper of foul play of some kind—usually quite unwarranted. I can only say,

Mr. Slade, should you prove your case, my connection with Mr. Furzedon is of course terminated—indeed I think I might say that under any circumstances; in the meantime I can only thank you for giving me this notice of your intentions.”

“It was only right you should have it,” rejoined Norman, rising; “you know the world, and especially the racing world, too well, not to know that some odium will probably apply to yourself, in consequence of your partner’s nefarious proceedings. What steps you will think best to take are, of course, no business of mine; I have only to warn you that the case is very clear against Furzedon. Good morning, Major Kynaston!” And with a somewhat stiff bow Norman Slade left the room.

“Pleasant this, by Jove!” muttered the Major as the street door closed behind his visitor. “Slade is just the man to work out this thing relentlessly, and, what’s more, the Jockey Club will listen to him. That young scoundrel! I have not the slightest doubt he’s guilty. Slade would never have spoken so confidently as he did if he had not got chapter and verse for it; he is quite right, some of the mud of this transaction is sure to stick to my skirts! Nobody will ever believe that I wasn’t in the swim; they will probably suggest that it was all my *planning*, only that I was too cunning to risk doing it myself! Quite likely the world will take that view of it, and will probably say that Furzedon has to bear all the punishment of it, while the chief offender has gone scatheless. Think of that young vagabond turning out to be Jordan & Co.!”

The Major’s very high tone about money-lenders may seem somewhat preposterous, considering that he was but a money-lender’s jackal himself; but he regarded all that as a strictly business transaction, and upon the rare occasions any of the fraternity were permitted to pass his door they got no further than into his own immediate den.

As he walked away Norman Slade came to the conclusion that Major Kynaston had been guilty of no connivance with his partner in the matter of the Epsom robbery. It had evidently been done without his knowledge, and it was quite evident to Slade that he was in considerable

ignorance of Mr. Furzedon's character and pursuits. "To think," he muttered with a smile, "of such a sly old fox as Kynaston thinks himself being bamboozled by such a young blackguard as Furzedon. However, one must get up pretty early to hold one's own with a pawnbroker's nephew, I suppose, and this one certainly seems exceptionally gifted."

XXXVIII.—SHERE ALI VANISHES.

HOBSON and Charlie Devereux rode back to camp at a hand gallop. Sharp and decisive were the former's orders to strike the tents and fall in as quickly as possible. In less than a couple of hours the soldiers had abandoned the shade of the grateful tope of palms and were tramping across the sandy plain that separated them from the wooded country. The soldiers all knew that their officers had come upon the enemy, and stepped out with a will, in the hope that at last they were about to come up with their wily fleet-footed foe, and settle with him for the many long wearisome marches he had caused them. Charlie Devereux, especially, is very sanguine on this score, but the tough veteran who leads them is by no means hopeful about it.

"I trust you may prove right, Devereux," said Hobson, in reply to the gleeful prognostications of his subaltern; "but they are cunning as jackals, these Pandies. They know where we halted, and Shere Ali would make a very good guess at how long we should be before we reached him, and I do not believe he will wait for us."

Hobson proved a true prophet, for when they arrived at the edge of the jungle the skirmishers speedily announced that the enemy's camp was deserted. His cooking fires were still smouldering, and it was evident, from other signs, that he had been encamped there for some days, but Shere Ali had now vanished, and there was nothing to show in what direction. It might have been by the road, but Hobson was well aware that there were numerous trails

through the jungle perfectly well known and not infrequently used by the natives, and it was more probable that the famous dacoit chief would sooner trust to the trackless forest to baffle the pursuit of the Feringee than rely upon the legs of his followers on the main road. This was rather a tangled knot to unravel, and Charlie chafed and fretted a good deal, because his captain halted instead of pushing along the main road rapidly in pursuit of the fugitives.

"Surely we are losing time," he remarked at length, no longer able to control his impatience.

"Don't cackle about what you don't understand, young 'un," rejoined Hobson, good-humouredly. "If I knew Shere Ali had gone that road; if I really had some grounds for supposing he had taken it, I would push on at once. As it is, I am not going to march my men off their legs in pursuit of a Will-o'-the-Wisp. You, no doubt, think Englishmen can beat these Pandies at anything. When it comes to running away, I tell you they're not in it with these fellows."

Charlie thought there was a lamentable want of dash about his leader; but Hobson had not hunted down the broken sepoy army in the great Mutiny time without learning how very hard they were to come up with when they did not deem it expedient to fight, and how they were served by their intimate knowledge of the by-ways of the country.

"It's weary work," continued Hobson, "but there is nothing for it but to make such inquiries as one can, and if we can make out nothing about Shere Ali and his band patrol the main road."

"Like policemen on their beats," said Charlie, with a face of extreme disgust.

"Just so," rejoined Hobson. "However, you needn't be down on your luck. I don't know why, but I have an idea that you are destined to be face to face with Shere Ali one of these days."

"What makes you think that?" asked Charlie.

"I tell you I don't know. Pshaw! that's not quite true. I'm not much given to dreaming, but I had a confused

dream the other night, in which you and a tall Pandie figured prominently."

"And what were we doing?"

"Well, your best to kill each other," replied Hobson.

"And how did it finish?"

"That is just what I can't tell you. It was most annoying. I awoke in the middle of it, and I was most anxious to see the finish of that fight."

"But who was getting the best of it?" said Charlie, with great interest.

"It was anybody's battle," replied Hobson, laughing. "Don't think me bloodthirsty, but I did want to see it fought out."

"Well," returned Charlie, "I need scarcely say I should have preferred your being able to say it was six to four on me when you left. Sorry, too, he is so big. Have you ever seen him?"

"No; but I've seen lots of his sort. They run tall, these Bengalee sepoys. I had our old bugbear Shere Ali and you in my head, which, with that remarkably tough mutton we dined on yesterday, would quite account for my vision."

"And where were you?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, you seldom see yourself. Don't you recollect that when you do, according to Scott's 'Legend,' you sleep in a 'bluidy plaid' ere long? But, holloa! what's this? It looks like a runner from headquarters." And as Hobson spoke a peon was seen coming along the road at the sling trot with which the native usually accomplishes the task of letter-bearing.

When he reached Hobson he stopped, made a low salaam, and handed him a letter. The Captain tore it open, and, as he glanced hastily over it, exclaimed, "My dream is about to come true. Hurrah! No more of this tiresome game of 'catch who catch can.' We are re-called, and are to be mounted. The chief says the fiat has gone forth that Shere Ali is to be suppressed at any price. It seems he has been throat-cutting on a somewhat extensive scale of late, and the Government are determined to take him dead or alive."

"Only give us horses, and we will soon account for him," cried Charlie, who, as an ex-Dragoon, believed implicitly in mounted men, and held that a regiment of Hussars could go anywhere and do anything. "But it will take a long while to make them."

"Put your cavalry ideas on one side, young 'un. Remember we are only mounted infantry, and our horses are hacks, not chargers."

Charlie made no reply. He comprehended but one idea of a soldier on horseback, and that was evidently not Hobson's. Still, if they only did get at Shere Ali, it wouldn't, he thought, much matter how. Charlie was burning for that fight of which Hobson had dreamt. "When shall we march?" he said at length.

"A little before daybreak to-morrow; and we will get back to headquarters as quickly as possible."

On their arrival at the cantonment, Charlie and Hobson found their work cut out for them, and for the next month were busily engaged in organizing the mounted infantry. The regiment was picked for men who could ride; and they found no lack of volunteers. The only difficulty lay in the selection, for the British soldier, in his anxiety to vary the monotony of his life, in some cases over-estimated his equestrian capabilities. The authorities were urgent for the departure of Hobson's command as soon as possible; and there was therefore no time to teach those to ride who had not some knowledge of it. Shere Ali was increasing in audacity week by week, and seemed ubiquitous in the Deccan. He had of late taken means to ensure there being no evidence against him by the wholesale murder of those he had robbed, after the manner of the Thugs; and there was, consequently, no actual proof of his being the author of some of the atrocities laid to his charge. He was said to be at the head of a numerous band of desperadoes, and to boast openly that he would not be taken alive, and neither asked nor gave quarter. The question of Shere Ali had become that of the apprehension of a great marauder; the laying hold of a Rob Roy or Schinderhannes, and the interest increased in intensity with the constantly-recurring stories of the dacoit's temerity and ferocity.

But a Nemesis attends these human tigers, and they mostly die violent deaths. The buccaneer chiefs, who made their victims walk the plank, chiefly "found a rope on it" before their course was run. Sooner or later some one revolts at the doings of these blood-stained monsters, and either betrays them to the powers or rids the world of them; and it is the conviction that this awaits them, and can only be averted by the terror they inspire, that makes them, once launched on their career, insatiable in their lust of blood. Shere Ali knew that his life was forfeit, and said grimly that when his time came his spirit would depart well attended.

Hobson's men at last satisfy the Colonel's critical eye; and, with young Devereux as his subaltern, the Captain is once more despatched in pursuit of his wily foe. There has grown up in the breasts of Hobson, and such of his men as were with him on his former expedition, a feverish thirst to settle accounts with Shere Ali, such as a keen shekarri might feel to come face to face with a "man-eater," such as some years previously pervaded the Central Indian Field Force on the subject of Tantia Topee. That sagacious chieftain was always dodging backwards and forwards across the Nerbudda, in a perfectly maddening manner, determined to fight only on his own terms, which, as a good strategist, meant when the chances were much in his favour. Again and again did one or other of the English leaders think themselves certain of his capture, only after two or three forced marches to find the wily Asiatic had once more slipped across the river. Shere Ali was enacting the great drama over again on a small scale, but with no abatement of the murder and outrage that characterised the great rebellion.

"There, Hobson," said the Colonel, as he bade the detachment farewell, "I hope you will have the luck to capture the scoundrel; there are so many parties out on the same errand that it is impossible he can evade you all. Depend upon it, Shere Ali's career is about run."

"My fellows are keen enough, sir. He's cost us too many long tramps not to make us eager to bring him to book, and this time he won't beat us for speed."

But Shere Ali proved more irritating to his enemies than ever upon this occasion. Detachments of cavalry and mounted infantry were, as they thought, closing in upon him on all sides, when suddenly the famous dacoit vanished; no intelligence of his whereabouts possible to be arrived at. Where he had gone or what had become of him nobody knew. Vague rumours there were that he had broken up his band and fled into Bengal. Weeks went by, and, all efforts to learn anything concerning him proving useless, his pursuers were reluctantly recalled, but not before the leaders of the various parties had confessed to being unable to discover any trace of him.

"Fairly beat, sir," said Hobson, when he reported himself to his chief on his return. "I learnt for certain that I was within forty miles of Shere Ali. Did it in fifteen hours, only to find him fled—where to it is impossible to conjecture. If the earth had swallowed him and his followers they could not have more utterly vanished."

"We shall hear of that fellow again before long," said the Colonel grimly, "and I hope hang him before we've done with him."

The chief proved a true prophet; ere a month had elapsed an outrage was perpetrated between Jubbulpore and Nagpore, which eclipsed all previous exploits of the kind. A treasure-chest under escort of an English officer and twenty sepoy was lured into an ambushade and slaughtered to a man. Except during the great Mutiny, it was rarely that the native had dared to raise his hand against the life of the white man, and it was regarded as a striking instance of Shere Ali's audacity that he should have ventured to slay a Feringee. For that he was the author of this crime none doubted, although none of the luckless escort lived to tell the tale of their disaster. Even in the worst days of Thuggee, the votaries of Bohwanee had never ventured to cast the dastardly rummel around the throat of the white man. Nor had the dacoits previously ever ventured to attack the dominant race. It had been the proud boast before the terrible outbreak of Fifty-Seven, that an English lady could travel all through the Indian Peninsula with no further escort than her native

servants in perfect safety. No wonder that a cry for vengeance went forth against this wholesale murderer, and the press, both English and native, was unanimous in demanding the life of Shere Ali. For once the blood-thirsty dacoit had committed not only an atrocious crime but a grave blunder. The massacred sepoy's were recruited from the Presidency, and had friends and relatives scattered far and wide through the country which Shere Ali had chosen for the scene of his operations—none quicker to see this than the Colonel of the Rifles.

“The beggar has overreached himself this time, Hobson. Some of the dead men's relatives are sure to betray him sooner or later. As for there being no witness to his last crime, that doesn't matter—we've enough against Shere Ali to hang him three times over.” And so the fiat went forth that Shere Ali was to be hunted down, and once more patrols of mounted infantry and cavalry were despatched to scour the country.

“Remember,” thundered the fiery old Commander-in-Chief at Madras, “I will have that man dead or alive, and you will march to and fro through the land like so many wandering Jews till you get him.”

“Gad, Charlie,” said Hobson, when that speech reached his ears, “it is devoutly to be hoped that some of us will lay hold of him before long, for Sir Timothy is a man of his word, and that means dacoit-hunting for life.” So once more the roads were scoured in all directions, villages searched, and heavy rewards offered for any intelligence that might lead to the arrest of Shere Ali, but again that mysterious personage had disappeared. One thing only was to be ascertained concerning him, namely, that he had dismissed the main body of his followers for the present, and retired with only a few of the most trusted to his stronghold; but where that stronghold was no man apparently could tell; it was rumoured that the secret of its whereabouts was jealously guarded and utterly unknown to the bulk of his band, only a few well-tried retainers being aware of its locality—ruffians for the most part as deeply blood-stained as himself.

But the patrolling and vigilant search for Shere Ali

ceased nowhere upon that account. "Sooner or later his necessities will compel the tiger to leave his lair," argued the Commander-in-Chief of the Presidency, "and then will come the hunter's opportunity."

XXXIX.—AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS THING.

DICK KYNASTON was not the man to await the tide of events upon finding himself involved in an awkward scandal. Innocent though he was, he saw at once that it would be difficult to make the world believe that he had no knowledge of his partner's practices. One thing however was quite clear to him, that there was no time to be lost in publicly repudiating all partnership with Furzedon in racing matters. No one would believe that he was not implicated in the affair unless he broke off all relations with Furzedon. Indeed, as the Major pondered over Norman Slade's story, the more indignant he became that he should have been such a mere puppet in the hands of his clever young friend. What, he, the knowing Dick Kynaston, the shrewd man about town, who knew the ropes, who was up to every move on the board—he to be hoodwinked by this young pawnbroker, and find himself mixed up in one of the most shameful Turf robberies he had ever heard of! He would ask Mr. Furzedon to call upon him for the last time, give him a piece of his mind, and tell him that in future they would be strangers to each other.

The Major gradually churned himself up to a very pretty state of indignation. Although by no means particular, he was honestly angry that he should have unwittingly become involved in such an ugly scrape as this promised to become. He was quite aware that his own racing career had not been of that blameless chivalric nature at which no stone can be thrown. He was reputed a sharp practitioner, and the world cannot pretend to decide where such gentlemen draw the line. Straight-going humdrum folks fail to see

much difference between what is termed "picking people up," by which is meant taking advantage of them, and picking pockets, and the Major, although his code of morality was otherwise, recognised this feeling. But, perhaps, what moved his wrath more than anything was the blow to his self-love, the idea that he should have been so completely overreached by a young gentleman whom he certainly deemed astute, but no sort of match for knowing Dick Kynaston, and yet he had been bamboozled into playing jackal to this young money-lender. He could not help showing his indignation in his letter, although when he sat down to pen his note to Furzedon, asking him to call the next morning, as he wanted to see him on a matter of business, nothing was further from his intention.

These *temperate* epistles we pen in our hot wrath are not read quite in the same light by their recipients, and if we only keep them till the next morning we should usually modify them considerably. I recollect submitting a studiously worded missive of this description to a friend, and exclaiming triumphantly with reference to the offender, "he can't say anything about that." My friend's eye twinkled as he replied, "Only that there's a good deal of east wind in it."

Now this was exactly what struck Furzedon when he read the Major's note. Dick Kynaston was wont to write in an off-hand jovial fashion, but this time Ralph saw at a glance that the language was iced. "I wonder what the deuce is up," he muttered, "there is a screw loose somewhere, and Kynaston evidently thinks I am to blame for it. I don't want to break with the Kynastons, more especially with the lady. She has been of some service to me already in a social way. She has given me several useful introductions, to say nothing of hints. She understands the game of society so thoroughly, I would sooner trust to her advice than that of any one in England. She first made me understand that to a man with money, tact, and a pretty wife, all society is attainable. What can have gone wrong; for that the Major thinks I've 'upset the coach' is evident in every line of his letter?" Ralph Furzedon made his way to the Major's house next day, and was promptly

shown into Kynaston's sanctum. He was a little surprised at the Major's curt "good morning," and saw at a glance that gentleman was seriously disturbed, and meant coming to the point with scant preamble; so, like the astute young man he was, Furzedon asked no questions, but left his companion to open the ball.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Furzedon ——" commenced Kynaston, with considerable *hauteur*.

"Sent for me, Major Kynaston? What the devil do you mean?" interposed Ralph sharply.

"If you will be good enough not to interrupt me you will know in five minutes," was the equally sharp rejoinder. "In the first place I am credibly informed that, instead of being an idle man-about-town living on your own means, you are in reality a money-lender."

"Even if that were so, which I don't admit, I should fancy there was nothing in the position to shock Major Kynaston," replied Furzedon sarcastically.

"I am not in the least shocked. I know half the money-lenders in London, but I don't *associate* with them. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly; though I do not see how your remark applies to me."

"Don't you?" returned Kynaston. "Then I will put it a little plainer to you. I no longer intend to be on visiting terms with Mr. Furzedon, *alias* Jordan & Co."

Furzedon winced, but his hardihood did not as yet fail him. "And who dares to say that I am Jordan & Co.?"

"One who seems to have a good deal more than that to allege against you—Norman Slade."

"Norman Slade!" ejaculated Furzedon, as the scene in the Paddock at Epsom shot athwart his brain. "What the deuce does Norman Slade know about me?"

"He knows who you are, and what you are," replied Kynaston sternly. "He knows that you hocused Bill Smith at Epsom, and means that all the world shall know it too."

"If he dares to bring such a charge against me," blustered Furzedon, starting to his feet, "I'll prosecute him for libel."

"Then you'll precious soon have the opportunity. He intends to bring your case before the Jockey Club at once, and has vowed not to rest till you're warned off the Heath."

"Let him. Giving a jockey a glass of wine is not hoccussing him. A fig for Norman Slade and his threats; he will find that charge rather difficult to substantiate."

"He says not," rejoined Kynaston, "and he is not the man to say so unless he has full proof of it. I have given you due warning of what is in store for you—henceforth remember we are strangers to each other."

"As you like," sneered Furzedon; "but you seem to forget that you made as good a thing out of Bill Smith's drunkenness as I did."

"I bet against a jockey who is unfit to ride as I do against a horse who is unfit to run, but I don't take part in bringing about that state of things!"

"And you mean to say that *I* do?" exclaimed Furzedon angrily.

"I say nothing about it, one way or another, and have nothing further to add but—good morning;" and as he spoke Kynaston rang the bell, and made his visitor a formal bow of dismissal.

For an instant the blood surged in Furzedon's temples, and he felt a fierce inclination to spring upon Kynaston; but mastering his passion by a violent effort, he turned on his heel, and abruptly left the room without recognising his host's salutation.

When Furzedon reached the street, he began to think seriously over this disaster that had befallen him. He had blustered and denied everything to Dick Kynaston; but, for all that, the charges were true, and he could see that the Major believed them to be so. The mere fact of being proclaimed a money-lender would, he knew, damn him socially; nor was he at all certain that Norman Slade would fail in proving the charge he intended to bring against him: he had employed men to lead the great jockey to his destruction. Ralph Furzedon had seen a good deal of the dirty side of life; it was not the first time he had used men as tools to effect his purposes; and he knew what such confederates were worth. Paid to do the

work with which their employer fears to soil his own fingers, they are prompt to sell him afterwards to any one who will buy their information. Ah! why had his nerve failed him at the last moment? These men had done their work well and sufficiently, but he was afraid, he stood so much money against Belisarius that his heart failed him; he determined to make assurance doubly sure. Just those few drops in the last glass would effectually madden the man's already heated brain, and destroy all judgment; but it put him—Furzedon—terribly in the hands of his myrmidons, who, dexterously as it was done, could not fail to see it. How had this all come against him at once? It was so many months back, that he had thought all danger of discovery was over. Then, again, how did Norman Slade learn that he traded in money under the name of Jordan & Co.? That was a secret he had jealously guarded. He had thought that known only to the confidential clerk who acted as his representative; and, as far as he could feel certain about any one, he was of that man's fidelity and discretion.

Where had Slade acquired this information? Those myrmidons of his might have been bribed to betray the story of the great Epsom race; but of his money-dealing they had no knowledge. How had that closely kept secret come to light? And, for the present, Ralph Furzedon was utterly at a loss to even suspect who it was that had divulged the mystery of his occupation. But he was at no loss to recognise the danger of his position, and his brain was already busily scheming as to how it was best, how it was possible, to meet these unpleasant revelations. He ran no risk of being entrapped by the meshes of the law, but his social ostracism was imminent. As a pawnbroker, and perpetrator of an infamous Turf robbery, that world he so coveted to mix with would have none of him, and this to Furzedon meant the loss of all he deemed life worth living for—the end of his ambition; to figure in that world, and at the same time to in some wise pull the strings of it, to know of the skeletons in the cupboard and look cynically on the raree show—and what men know more of these last than usurers and solicitors?—all that would have delighted

Furzedon. Well, there was no necessity for it as yet, for he supposed the best way out of the embroglio would be to go abroad for a time; stories of this sort speedily blew over; and, unless the affair was kept constantly before it, in a week or two the world would cease to talk about it. Norman Slade, too, would be checkmated about that Epsom business; it would be little use bringing such a charge against a man who had crossed the Channel, and Furzedon felt that he should get out of the scrape cheaply at the expense of a few months' absence from London. Better for him that the charge should be dropped than brought, even if not substantiated.

One thing, however, puzzled Furzedon much; he could not conceive how it was that his identity with Jordan & Co. had leaked out; there was no one whom he could suspect, for, strange to say, that Prance might have betrayed him never entered his head. His relations with that worthy had been so long dropped, and he so rarely encountered him, that he had forgotten that Prance knew all the history of his past life; but he swore a great oath of vengeance against the man who had proclaimed the fact that he was a pawnbroker and a usurer should he ever discover it. And, though in his first surprise at finding Norman Slade so accurately informed as to his antecedents, Prance had not occurred to him as the informant; still, sooner or later, it was pretty certain to flash across him, and then it was likely that vow would be kept with ruthless exactitude.

He had regained his chambers, and was still pondering over all these things, when his servant brought in a pencilled note, which he handed to him with the intimation that the gentleman was waiting. Furzedon glanced hastily at the note, and muttered to himself, "Sturgeon! now what on earth can bring him here?" He might well ask, for Mr. Jacob Sturgeon was the confidential and personal representative of Jordan & Co., and his visiting Furzedon's rooms was strictly interdicted. As the latter knew, it must be something of considerable importance that led him to disregard his instructions on that point.

"Show him up," said Furzedon; and in another minute

Mr. Sturgeon entered the room—a plump, quietly-dressed, prosperous man of business.

“I am sorry to intrude, sir; but, as you can easily guess, it is a matter of importance that has made me disobey orders—a circumstance I thought you should be made acquainted with without loss of time.”

“Yes, yes!” said Furzedon, impatiently. “Get on; what is it?”

“Well, sir,” replied Mr. Sturgeon, “we’ve had rather an awkward scene up at the office. A Major Braddock called in about those bills of young Devereux’s. He pointed out that Mr. Devereux was in India, and therefore, for the present, quite out of our reach; but that his friends were anxious to come to terms with us, and that he was empowered to agree to any reasonable composition.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Furzedon; “I thought they would be glad to come to terms before long. And you, what did you say?”

“Oh! sir,” replied Sturgeon, smiling, “I told them the old story—that for money lent upon next to no security, as Mr. Devereux’s was, we claimed, and expected to get, heavy interest; that there were also legal expenses; that I would submit what he said to my principals; but that I could hold forth no hope of their foregoing their claims; that we could afford to wait; that, though Mr. Devereux had been unfortunate, we knew him to be a gentleman, and felt perfect confidence in his eventually meeting his liabilities.”

“Quite right,” replied Furzedon; “and what did Major Braddock say to that?”

“Well, he astonished me not a little, sir. As a matter of course, I looked upon it as only delicate fencing for the best terms on either side; but Major Braddock suddenly interrupted me with ‘Stop all the clap-trap of your class; we happen to know who your principal is; we know who it is that trades in usury under the name of Jordan & Co.; we know all about the pawnbroker’s shop in the next street, and are quite prepared to go into court if you don’t make fair terms with us.’ I rejoined that, if compelled to it, I didn’t suppose that my principals would object to that way of coming by their own.”

"Ah! and what did he say to that?" inquired Furzedon, eagerly.

"Major Braddock," replied Sturgeon, "took me up sharp. 'You mistake,' he said, 'your principal—for you have only one—would be very unwilling to go into the witness-box; he is a good young man, and loth that his left should know what his right hand is doing. No, no! Ralph Furzedon don't wish to figure before his friends and acquaintances in his real character. No; the sooner you let him know that we are aware of who we are dealing with the better.'"

"And that was all that passed between you?" asked Furzedon.

"Pretty well, sir," rejoined Sturgeon; "I told him politely he was mistaken, but he only rejoined, more briefly than civilly, 'Not much,' threw his card on the table, and left the place."

"Quite right to come and tell me," said Furzedon. "You have, of course, no idea how he came by his knowledge?"

"No, sir; I could have sworn that nobody either at the shop or the offices had any idea who Jordan & Co. were, except myself, and the secret has never passed my lips."

"Thank you; that will do," replied Furzedon. "If Major Braddock calls again, stick to it that he is mistaken. Don't come here again unless you think it absolutely necessary," and, with a careless nod, Furzedon intimated to Mr. Sturgeon that his interview was at an end.

XL.—A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

"HALLOA, Bertie! where have you been all the morning; under what pretence have you been evading your military duties? Allow me to congratulate you," exclaimed young Sparsnot.

"I've been on a board on forage; but I don't see that that's a particular subject for congratulation," returned

Slade, as he took a chair in the mess-room, and prepared to assuage the hunger that his morning's work had created.

"Then you've heard nothing about Tom Henderson's letter, although it specially concerns you?"

"Not a word," replied Bertie; "what has Tom got to say?"

"First of all," rejoined young Sparshot, "Tom has met his Fate; and, as his Fate happens to be possessed of more dollars than a Hussar ever dreamt of, he is going to sell out, and that gives you your troop, *Captain Slade*."

"We shall all be sorry to lose Henderson," said Bertie, "but promotion is promotion, and in this case we have only to congratulate him on his retirement; but what is this other news?"

"Well, for some inscrutable reason, it seems the authorities have decided to send us out to India at once, instead of in the autumn."

"You don't mean that!" exclaimed Slade; "unless they've good grounds, it is rather rough upon us all. It's always a bad business having to dispose of horses in a hurry."

"Yes," rejoined Sparshot; "the end of the hunting season, and all the officers of Her Majesty's —th Hussars are likely, I am afraid, to have a bad sale."

Bertie Slade was not a little taken aback by the news of the sudden order for India. He knew very well what this meant. That for the few weeks left to them there would be plenty of work to be done; that every officer's hands would be full, and leave of absence difficult to obtain; and yet he felt that it was absolutely necessary for him to pay a short visit to London. He had written, as we know, to Mrs. Connop, and in his letter had vaguely told her that a very serious charge was likely to be advanced against Ralph Furzedon, and delicately hinted that she would do well to suspend further intimacy with him until she heard the result. He did not like to speak more plainly; but his meaning was that Miss Devereux, to whom he firmly believed Furzedon to be engaged, should pause before uniting herself to a man whom a few weeks might see socially blasted. He had not liked to particularise the

offence of which Furzedon had been guilty, and to attempt interference in the slightest degree with Miss Devereux's matrimonial intentions was, he felt, quite out of his province; and yet, knowing as he did from his Uncle Norman the story of Furzedon's life, he felt it was impossible that he could look on and see the girl he passionately loved married to such a scoundrel. Lettie Devereux need never fear about him; he might be destined never to win her for his wife, but for all that, surely he ought not to let her contract this marriage in ignorance; surely no money could compensate for the utter loss of position which awaited Ralph Furzedon. He had not intended to speak more plainly. A very little, and the accusation would be publicly proclaimed in the press; but, now he was going to India, it might not be brought forward till after his departure. There was delay sometimes about these things; and it was possible that the knowledge might come to Miss Devereux too late.

Bertie's serious face was the cause of not a little chaff from his gay companions; as young Sparshot said, Slade was the only man who apparently appreciated the gravity of the situation. "He'll chill the very marrow in our bones directly. I can see he is just about to begin, with mocking laughter:

'Ah! know ye the land of the sepoy and tiger,
And the terrible pranks that they play in that clime.'

Bertie laughed as he rose. "One would have thought, Spar," he said, "that the 'terrible pranks' were thrashed out of the sepoy during the Mutiny times; but, according to Charlie Devereux, there are some of them still untamed. No, I've got a few things I want to settle before I start, and I'm rather bothered about how to do it." And so saying Bertie left the room.

"Yes," he thought, when he reached his own quarters, "there is no help for it; I must run up to town, see Mrs. Connop, and tell her the whole story; if she thinks fit to let her niece marry a man with such a charge hanging over him, I can do no more. It is impossible for me to speak to Lettie herself; though how, in spite of his money, she

could accept such a cad as Furzedon!" And here Bertie Slade wound up his train of thought by discharging a volley of maledictions against that gentleman.

Bertie Slade easily obtained the short leave he ventured to ask for. He had a good many things to do in town besides his interview with Mrs. Connop. He was anxious to see his Uncle Norman, to ascertain when this business of Furzedon's would be brought forward. And Major Braddock he also wanted to talk with, partly on his own account and partly concerning Charlie Devereux's. Major Braddock, however, he felt certain of seeing before he sailed. The Major retained the greatest possible interest in his old regiment, and was little likely to let them sail for the East without coming down to Portsmouth to witness their embarkation. The settlement of Charlie's debts had been left to the discretion of Bob Braddock; and Bertie was in ignorance of what steps the Major had lately taken about their settlement. The last time he had heard from his Uncle Bob that gentleman had assured him there was no hurry, that the less they troubled about it the more likely an advantageous offer was to come from the other side. But the Major was now acquainted with the identity of Jordan & Co., and Bertie thought that would probably change his tactics.

However, the day after his arrival in town, at the earliest canonical hour permissible for calling, Gilbert Slade made his way into Onslow Gardens. "Mrs. Connop was at home," he was told, in answer to his inquiry. And without more ado he was ushered up into the drawing-room, where, to his great astonishment, he found himself face to face with Lettie Devereux. The situation was awkward. What he had to say he could neither say to Miss Devereux nor before her. And yet that say it he would he was doggedly determined. Lettie rose to receive him; and, though taken by surprise as well as himself, yet she masked her feelings well. Her heart beat quickly, but her chance had come; and come what might it should go hard if before he left she had not disabused Mr. Slade's mind of any idea that she was engaged to Mr. Furzedon. Mrs. Connop had not destroyed Bertie's note, and Miss Deve-

reux had had little difficulty in persuading her aunt to allow her to see it. She read between the lines easily enough, and laughed as she said, "I think, Auntie dear, this letter was meant more for me than for you, and has been written, I have no doubt, under a very mistaken idea." And Mrs. Connop was far too shrewd a woman not to think her niece was taking a correct view of the subject.

"Charmed to see you, Mr. Slade," said Lettie, as she rose to receive her visitor. "Since poor Charlie's 'grief' we have never set eyes upon you. My aunt will be down in a few minutes"—Miss Devereux devoutly hoped she would not—"and I am sure is dying, as we all are, to thank you for your kindness to him in his trouble."

"Pray don't mention it," rejoined Bertie, "it's one of the canons of the service that we must stick to each other; we all did the best we could for Charlie, but you know there was nothing for it but India."

"I know," replied Lettie, "but I am afraid he finds the life out there very dull."

"Not a bit of it, Miss Devereux," rejoined Slade. "Charlie is engaged in quite a lively pursuit out there; he and half the soldiers in the Madras Presidency apparently are engaged in hunting down the craftiest and most murderous old robber that ever took to the roads. This Shere Ali keeps them tramping continually up and down the Presidency, and seems as difficult to lay hands upon as a Will-o'-the-Wisp. We shall perhaps get there in time to get a turn at him too."

"You, Mr. Slade! Why, what do you mean?"

"Ah! I forgot I hadn't told you we've got our orders for India; and, as luck has it, are going to the same Presidency that Charlie is in. We are off in about three or four weeks."

Then the conversation rather languished. These were two young people very desirous of saying something to each other, and neither of them knowing exactly how to begin. Of course, it was all remarkably simple. Bertie Slade wished to impress upon Miss Devereux that she really ought not to marry Furzedon; while the lady on her side was equally anxious to impress upon him that she

had not the slightest intention of doing so. It is all very well to smile as a bystander, and say, "Absurd! These people could not fail to come to an explanation at once." But have you no experience of these comparatively easy explanations *not* come to? Have you never thought, as you gained the street, of the thing you wished you had said in the drawing-room? And do not all of us know that the explanation so easy at first becomes more difficult day by day? Now, Lettie Devereux had good grounds for thinking that Bertie Slade was rather smitten with herself, and this seemed to make it rather difficult for her to volunteer the information that she was not engaged to Mr. Furzedon. If Bertie would only afford her the slightest opening it would be so easy; but then, Bertie, on his side, felt that he could not congratulate her. And that was the only way he could see of alluding to what he supposed to be a settled thing.

"You will probably see Charlie, then?" said Miss Devereux, at length, with that usual disregard of the size of the country apt to characterise people who have never been there.

"Probably," replied Bertie, "though it may be some time first; and I have come to say 'good-bye,' Miss Devereux; and I have one favour to ask you before I go. I wrote a note a short time ago to Mrs. Connop. I don't know whether she showed it to you, but, at all events I hope she will."

"I have seen it," interrupted Lettie. "Still, what have I to do with it?"

"I only want you to believe that I am quite certain of what I say in it, and that I am not merely detailing idle gossip."

"As I said before, I really don't see anything in it that concerns me."

Gilbert Slade was troubled. It was evident that he could depend upon no help from Miss Devereux. It was possible that she might indignantly refuse to listen to any imputation on her lover. But Bertie was resolute to speak out.

"I should have thought," he remarked, "that you could

not be indifferent to hearing that any one you had lived upon friendly terms with ran the risk of being brought to shame. I have no wish to discuss it, but I thought that as he had stayed at North Leach, and was intimate with you all, you ought to know it."

"Why ought I to know it?" exclaimed Miss Devereux, indignantly. "Why will you keep insisting that this specially concerns me? If Mr. Furzedon has done anything disgraceful, surely my father or my brothers are the people you ought to communicate with."

It is very rarely that loss of temper conduces to promote a good understanding between people who are at cross purposes. But Miss Devereux's natural exasperation somewhat cleared the air, and dispersed the fog in which they were both rapidly losing themselves. Bertie, like herself, was now not a little nettled, and it was somewhat sharply that he retorted, "I can only say that, according to rumour, anything affecting Mr. Furzedon is likely to be more severely felt by Miss Devereux than by any other of her family. I suppose I was wrong to touch upon the subject, but Charlie and I were staunch friends."

"I know that," rejoined Lettie, gently. "And you are only saying to me what you would have said to him, had he been in England. But you're under a misapprehension, Mr. Slade. You have heard an absurd and rather annoying rumour that got about last season, and for which, believe me, there never has been the slightest foundation."

"Do you mean to say," said Bertie, eagerly, "that there is no engagement between you and Mr. Furzedon?"

"Certainly not; I hardly understand myself how the rumour got about."

"As far as I am concerned, I had it from your own brother."

"What, from Charlie? when?"

"Last spring, and that is why I have regarded it as a fact. When a young lady's brother tells you the thing is so, you must admit your knowledge is derived from good authority."

"Yes, indeed," replied Miss Devereux; "but who on earth could have put that into Charlie's head? I am per-

fectly sure it never occurred to himself;" but here their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Connop, who was unfeignedly glad to see her old favourite again, and gave Gilbert Slade a most cordial welcome.

"How long are you up in town for?" she asked, as she settled herself in her chair.

"Mr. Slade has come to say good-bye, Auntie," interposed Miss Devereux.

"Good-bye, child! why, he has hardly said how d'ye do, and we haven't seen him for months. I've got lots to say to you, Mr. Slade. I am dying for a long gossip with you. What day will it suit you to come out and dine with us?"

"I am very sorry, but I hardly think that is possible. I have only to-night and to-morrow night in town, and shall be so busy all day that dinner will have to be a very movable feast with me. There is, of course, a great deal to do, and we really are off at once, and at very short notice."

Then the conversation became general, and Mrs. Connop was deeply interested in the fact that the —th Hussars were going to the same Presidency that Charlie was in, and that there was a possibility of that young scapegrace coming across his old comrades once more. Then Mrs. Connop, ever sanguine, began to speculate on the chances of Charlie getting back to his old corps, which she thought might be effected soon after the —th Hussars got out there, and Gilbert Slade had to explain to her that the War Office people wouldn't stand quite such a rapid shuffling of the cards as that; then Charlie's affairs were discussed, and Mrs. Connop was very anxious to know if any progress had been made in their settlement, and was loud in her expressions of gratitude to Major Braddock for all he had done for him.

"It really is very good of him to trouble himself about Charlie's business at all," remarked the good lady; "in fact he don't deserve help or pity from any one."

"Uncle Bob is a real good sort," interposed Slade. "He took a fancy to your brother, you see, Miss Devereux, at first start, and although I own he was awfully disgusted at his having to leave the regiment, yet he is always staunch

and true to those he has once befriended. I don't know what he has done about Charlie's business, but I shall see him to-night, and will come down to-morrow, and let you know all about it, and now I must be going."

"Why, I've seen nothing of you," cried Mrs. Connop: "I've not had time to ask you about this business of Mr. Furzedon."

"I don't think there is any necessity for me to say any more than I have done," replied Slade, with a meaning glance at Lettice; "the papers will tell you all about it before a few weeks are over. Good-bye, Mrs. Connop, good-bye, Miss Devereux," and as he bent over her hand, he said in a low tone, "You can't think how happy you have made me," and then, with a hearty invitation from Mrs. Connop to come to luncheon to-morrow, Gilbert Slade took his departure. Not half a score of words, and yet Lettice Devereux seemed quite as content as if she had received a more explicit declaration.

XLI.—CHARLIE'S BAPTISM OF FIRE.

CHARLIE DEVEREUX was once upon the war-path; and he and his comrades, like baffled hounds, grew thoroughly savage in the pursuit of that perplexing marauder Shere Ali. That the famous dacoit chief can assemble some hundreds at his back should he so will was now well known to the authorities; but that his influence through the Deccan is a thing that can be no longer borne with is a fact thoroughly recognised. It is true he rarely gathers together his followers in such numbers as he can command; but that he can put himself at the head of a most formidable band at two or three days' notice is now perfectly understood. His tactics are those of the old Highland veterans in our own country, who sallied forth upon their roving expeditions, sped homeward with their plunder, and then rapidly dispersed.

Shere Ali makes similar outbursts in unexpected locali-

ties, and then, in like manner, disappears with his booty, and is apparently swallowed up in adjacent jungles. The marauder, too, has acquired a strange notoriety through all that country. Information given detrimental to himself and his followers has several times been punished with swift and singular barbarity. The villagers are shy of any allusion to his whereabouts or proceedings; and his brigandage has attained such an extensive scale as to augur pitiful weakness on the part of any government that fails speedily to repress it. Even the veteran Hobson shook his head over it, and said, in the course of his varied experience, that Shere Ali was the most aggravating customer he had ever had to deal with.

"We have come across him once, Charlie," he said, as they jogged along one morning at the head of their now mounted men, "or else, upon my word, I should begin to think this was quite a legendary chieftain; but he and his rapparees *did* shoot at us once; and we were very close upon their track a few hours afterwards."

"Yes," rejoined Charlie Devereux, "and the massacre of poor young Blades and his escort was a startling proof of Shere Ali being very much alive and on the move; but the dream will come true, Hobson, I know it will. We shall come up with him at last; and then, if I know anything of the temper of our fellows, they will be rather hard to hold. They have hunted him for many weary miles, and heard so many tales of the atrocities of himself and his followers, that I don't think there will be much quarter given when the day of reckoning does come."

"No; nor *asked*," said Hobson. "You will see these fellows will die grimly as a fox in a trap, and with a like snarl upon their lips. But, halloa! what the deuce is up? this looks like business of some sort." And, as he spoke, Hobson pointed to one of the advance guard, who was riding back to them as fast as his horse could carry him.

"Now, Wilson, what is it?"

"Sergeant Rivers sent me back, sir," replied the soldier, as he saluted, "to say that he thought we were pretty close upon these dacoit chaps, this time. There's a pretty sight

when you get round the bend, sir ;" and the soldier pointed to the turn in the road.

"Pass the word to close up, and sound the attention, bugler," said Hobson. "Now, what's round the bend, Wilson?"

"Well, sir, we must have pretty near caught these scoundrels at their hellish work ; there's a tolerably strong travelling party, some of 'em well-armed, too, who have been massacred to a man. The sergeant bid me tell you that he thought the dacoits must be in considerable force."

"Bring them on at a trot, Devereux, as soon as they have closed up ; I'm going to gallop forward and see what has taken place yonder."

Accompanied by a soldier, Hobson galloped forward, and the minute he rounded the turn in the road the tragedy of the morning lay exposed to his view. About a score of men lay stretched upon the road, weltering in their blood ; and the whole scene was easy of interpretation, as the sergeant in charge of the advance guard at once pointed out to Hobson. "These two men here by the side of the road were evidently the leaders of the party."

"Evidently Parsee traders," remarked Hobson, as he dismounted from his horse, "and the others, their servants and an escort of soldiers, whom they had hired to protect them. They have apparently been surprised and butchered to a man, without offering much resistance."

"Just so," replied the sergeant, "there is a stream just away to the right here, and Shere Ali's people must have come upon them while they were cooking their mid-day meal under the trees there."

"I see ; and these fellows fled into the open, and were all cut down before they could make any stand at all."

"They weren't all killed quite in that way, sir," replied the sergeant drily. "This Baboo here was murdered in cold blood, and tortured first ; look at his fingers, sir."

"I see," said Hobson, "it's an old trick of theirs, burnt nearly off ; they've bound them in tow soaked with oil and then set fire to them ; whether they've done it from sheer devilry, because they didn't get so much money as they expected, or quite as likely to wring information from him

about his property, I don't know. Ha! the other fared very little better; you can see the mark of the cord round his neck; they half throttled him before they killed him."

"We can't have been very far from catching them in the very act, sir," said the sergeant.

"You're right, Rivers, these bodies are not yet cold. I don't believe these villains can be above three or four hours ahead of us, perhaps not even so much."

The robbers had done their work cleanly. All the animals belonging to the murdered party they had carried off with them, and the dead had been stripped of everything valuable about their persons. Nothing was left but the corpses of the two traders, their servants and escort, to tell the story of that day's cruel work. By this time the remainder of the troop had come up, and were surveying the scene with critical eyes. Old soldiers, most of them, who had been through the fell fighting of the Mutiny, and to whom the sight of a field strewn with dead was no novelty.

"Not a wounded man amongst them," growled one of these. "These devils give no quarter, and, if ever we do come up with them, by ——"

"They can't expect to get it. Look at that, too," and the speaker and several of his comrades gazed curiously at the charred stumps of the hapless trader's fingers.

"Now, Rivers," exclaimed Hobson, "I'm going to push forward at once. On you go, with your advance guard; keep your eyes skinned, and of course fall back the minute you get touch of the enemy. I suspect Shere Ali is at the head of a strong band this time."

So little trouble had the robbers taken to mask their movements that the way they had taken was pretty evident. Some of the soldiers, too, by this time had become clever at scouting, and the best of these were put into the advance guard, a bare half-mile from the scene of the massacre, and it was evident that the marauders had left the main road and struck across one of the jungle-trails to the right.

It was further pretty apparent, from the horse-prints, that they were in considerable numbers. Hobson had no doubt that, according to his wont, Shere Ali, having placed

a hundred miles or so between himself and the scene of his crime, would disband his followers, with the exception of a trusted few, and then betake himself to his secret lurking-place, the whereabouts of which so completely baffled his pursuers; but its secret was well kept, and, so far, the Feringees had got no hint of it. Hobson knew that so long as he was close upon the trail of his foe, and that Shere Ali kept at the head of a numerous band, he would not be difficult to follow; but so soon as he dispersed his rascallions there would be great danger of losing trace of him. It had happened so near half a dozen times to patrols who deemed him within their grasp, and Hobson had no doubt that upon the one occasion he and Charlie Devereux had stumbled upon the dacoit chief, Shere Ali had but a mere handful of men with him, and thence the ease with which the wily Indian had evaded him.

Keeping his men well in hand, Hobson plunged into the jungle and followed fast in the footprints of his flying foe. The men were all on the *qui vive*, with both eyes and ears alert for the slightest indication of the robbers. Every man of them knew that their ride must be both fast and far to give them any hope of coming up with the dacoit chief. The immunity he had so far enjoyed from the penalties of his crimes had been so far in great measure due to the celerity of his movements. He and his followers invariably fled from the scene of their murderous exploits by forced marches, and Hobson and his troop had been too long scouring the country in pursuit of him not to know that to capture Shere Ali involved beating him at his own tactics.

Silently they went on in the same monotonous jog-trot, for Hobson had sternly ordered that there should be no talking in the ranks, and impressed upon his men that their march must be conducted with as little noise as possible. Mile after mile was thrown behind them, and still the advance guard reported "no glimpse of the enemy." Still the footprints of a large body of horses were ever in their front. Hobson's face wore an anxious expression, while young Devereux chafed inwardly at what he irreverently termed "the slowness of his captain."

If it had been left to him, he would have advanced at a hand gallop, the result of which would have been, that if he failed to come up with the foe in less than two hours the horses would have been about ridden to a standstill; while if he did succeed in overtaking them his men would have laboured under the disadvantage of being upon half-blown cattle.

However, Hobson had too much experience to fall into any such error. If his face wore a thoughtful expression it was because he was calculating how much longer he could jog along at the moderate pace he was going without pulling up to give men and horses a temporary rest. Experience had taught him that the dacoits managed to do with very short halts; and he and his men would be, therefore, constrained to do the like. It was likely to be a severe strain upon both men and horses for six-and-thirty hours or more; for perhaps two days and nights, he calculated, the whole party would have to do with very little rest. "As for the men," thought Hobson, "they must contrive to eat and sleep in the saddle, but pull up to bait the horses we must." Water, too, was becoming a very serious consideration. The men's water-bottles, he knew, must be pretty well emptied; and then, again, what was to be done about the horses?—they had no idea where or when they would come upon it. However, Hobson comforted himself with the reflection that water was as necessary to Shere Ali as to himself, and that the dacoits must know of a stream on their road. His mind was destined to be speedily set at rest on the one point. Suddenly shots were heard in the front, and the advance guard were seen falling rapidly back. Sergeant Rivers hurriedly reported that they had come upon the rear of the dacoits, apparently unexpected by the latter. The marauders were marching in rather irregular and desultory fashion, but closed up and faced about the minute they discovered their pursuers.

"They mean fighting, sir, never fear," said the sergeant, as he finished his report.

"Is there a large body of them?" asked Hobson.

"Rather difficult to say, sir," replied the sergeant; "but they've formed across the road."

"Mr. Devereux," said Hobson, "take ten files, creep round the jungle to the right, so as to take 'em in flank. I'm going to attack in front at once; but nothing demoralises these black fellows like finding their assailants have got round their flank. You had better go with him, Rivers. One moment, Devereux, get well round, remember, almost towards their rear, before you attack; never fear but what you'll get plenty of fighting."

Charlie touched his hat; moved rapidly to the rear, told off his score of men; and then, accompanied by Rivers, plunged into the jungle. Hobson, without further delay, at once dashed at his enemy in front; but the dacoits stood their ground, and evidently meant to offer a stubborn resistance.

The English soldiers had dismounted, and, in skirmishing order, had advanced rapidly along the road, and had spread through the jungle on either side of it. But the robbers were much too cunning to keep on the road; they quickly resorted to the cover on either side of it, and the rattle of the musketry became now continuous. Taking advantage of every tree, the soldiers closed rapidly in on their foes, but the latter apparently had no intention of meeting the Feringees at close quarters. They retreated sullenly before them, at the same time yielding ground slowly and disputing it yard by yard.

Charlie Devereux meanwhile was doing his best to carry out his instructions, and, though the rattle of the musketry made both himself and his men impatient to take part in the fray, yet he resolved, in his own parlance, to "ride strictly to orders," which, however, were made the more difficult to carry out from the fact of the robbers falling back, and which were destined to end most unfortunately for Charlie. Shere Ali, flushed with the successes which had attended his late exploits, and finding himself—much against his will—brought to bay, determined, as he said, to read the Feringees a lesson. His force very much outnumbered that of Hobson, and it had occurred to him to put in force the same manœuvre that his antagonists had employed. He had detached quite a third of his force, under one of his ablest lieutenants, with similar orders to

those of Devereux. The result was obvious: these two parties, each stealing round to fall upon their adversary's flank, must come into contact. And Devereux and his party, instead of surprising the robbers, suddenly found themselves surrounded by the enemy in numbers of four-fold their own strength.

With a shout of "Follow me!" Devereux dashed straight at the dacoits with the intention of cutting his way through, and then falling on the flank of the main body in compliance with his instructions. But weight of numbers brought the English soldiers back, and the result of a few minutes' sharp fighting saw Charlie stretched senseless from a sabre cut dealt by the grim old sowar who led the enemy's flanking party. Sergeant Rivers, who was now left in command, made two desperate charges in the hopes of at least carrying Devereux off with him; but it was in vain, the robbers were too numerous for him; and he was eventually driven back on the main body, with the loss of half his men.

But Hobson understood his business, and, as soon as he had become aware of the fact that his flank was turned, he fell back and rapidly showed a front in the direction of his fresh assailants; in short, the English formation speedily became that of a somewhat irregular square, and their leader confined himself at present to the defences. Hobson and his men had not fought the Pandies for nothing; he had miscalculated the strength of his antagonists, and had not calculated upon Shere Ali's crafty manœuvre, but he laughed at the idea of the dacoits, however numerous, breaking his formation. In vain did Shere Ali urge on his men, and exhort them not to spare the infidel dogs, nor to leave a Feringee alive to see the sun go down. After one or two half-hearted attempts the marauders recognised that the Feringees were a very tough nut to crack; the deadly Enfields scattered havoc in their ranks, and they eventually recoiled, cowed and discomfited. Shere Ali gnashed his teeth with rage; but he, too, was quick to understand that the massacre of a troop of English soldiers was a very different thing from that of a couple of *soubradors* and their native escort. He drew off suddenly

like a wounded tiger balked of his prey. And Hobson took advantage of the lull to reckon up his casualties. It had been a sharp brush, and, though the dacoits were strewn pretty thickly on the ground, yet his own loss was considerable for an affair of this nature. He was much concerned to hear that Charlie Devereux had fallen, and no sooner were the robbers fairly in retreat than Sergeant Rivers and a party were sent out to bring in their officer. It was possible he might not have been killed; and, at all events, it was their duty to see they left no wounded behind them. But the dacoits had made sure work of the fallen, the wounded had been butchered where they lay. One thing only was extraordinary--Charlie Devereux, whether dead or alive, had disappeared.

Hobson looked very grave when it was reported to him that Mr. Devereux was missing. Anything was better than this. Shere Ali's ferocious character was well known; and even the men felt that their comrades who lay cold and stark in the jungle had met with a more merciful fate than was probably reserved for the officer who had led them. That he had been carried off by the dacoits there could be no doubt. It was hardly likely that they would have done this unless he had been alive. And the toughest veterans among them shook their heads ruefully over the sort of mercy that Shere Ali was likely to mete out to a captive in the hour of his defeat. Hobson's resolve was soon made; in half an hour he was once more pressing on the footsteps of his retreating foe; he was resolved to stick to Shere Ali's skirts till men or horses gave out. He would track this human tiger to his stronghold, or prevent his ever reaching it. In face of a very hot pursuit it was possible that Shere Ali would think it best not to betray the secret of his citadel; he was far too shrewd not to understand that once known his capture became a simple matter of a few days. The English could bring up force to overwhelm him in a marvellously short time. Hobson knew, moreover, that his own party was only one of a perfect chain of patrols, sent forth for the capture of the dacoit chief. "It was odd," he thought, "if he could not capture Shere Ali himself, he would succeed in hunting

him into the hands of some other patrol of the cordon." And therefore he continued to hang upon the trail of the dacoits with untiring pertinacity.

XLII.—MRS. KYNASTON'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

BERTIE SLADE walked away in a very different state of mind from Onslow Gardens to that in which he had arrived there. What a fool he had been! ingenuously tormenting himself about Lettie's betrothal, when all the while no such engagement ever existed. Well, it was all right now, and he cared little what became of Furzedon, though he felt pretty certain that Norman Slade would take good care that righteous retribution was dealt out to him. Then he thought of how he had fallen into this mistake. He was quite certain that it was from Charlie he first heard of it; but he remembered what Lettie had said, "that somebody must have put it into his head, for that her brother was the last man to arrive at such a conclusion from his own observations." And then it flashed across him that he also had heard it from other lips. Mrs. Kynaston had told him the same story. Was it not possible that Charlie's knowledge of his sister's engagement had been derived from the same source? He turned this over in his mind as he walked along. Charlie was very thick with Mrs. Kynaston, and Bertie remembered well it was just after that flying visit of young Devereux's to town that he told this bit of news. "And, by heaven!" muttered Bertie to himself, "I recollect now. He said he heard it from Mrs. Kynaston; and remarked how odd it was that he should have the first tidings of his sister's intended marriage from any other but herself."

Bertie Slade looked at his watch. It was early yet, he thought; he had still plenty of time before dinner; somehow he didn't seem to have half so much to do as he thought he had that morning. The fact was the important part of his business in town was already brought to a

satisfactory conclusion. He ought to call and wish Mrs. Kynaston good-bye before he sailed. "I'd make any bet that this rumour was a bit of her handiwork; but why? What object could she have in setting such a report afloat? I shouldn't fancy her a mischievous woman either." And still puzzling over Mrs. Kynaston's motives Gilbert Slade arrived at the little house in Mayfair, and was forthwith ushered into Mrs. Kynaston's drawing-room.

"Mr. Slade," exclaimed that lady, her eyes sparkling with genuine pleasure, "it is ages since I've seen or even heard of you. Sit down, do, and give an account of yourself."

"There is not much to be told," he replied; "we got through the winter at York pretty much as they always do. We hunted all day and danced all night; rode as hard as we dared, and valed as long as we could last."

"Well, you are not very much to be pitied. We had the hunting, of course, but as for our dances, they were as thinly spread as the butter of our childhood. And now I suppose you are up for some time?"

"On the contrary, I have but three days' leave; and, sad to say, have come to wish you good-bye; we sail for India in about three weeks."

The colour faded out of Kate Kynaston's cheeks as, in a low voice, she faltered out, "What is the meaning of this freak?"

"We don't know," replied Slade; "but it is a freak of the War Office, not of mine."

"What, the regiment is ordered out?"

"Yes, at monstrous short notice; and, as far as we can see, for no particular reason. Pray don't suppose I am very enthusiastic about it."

"Nor, I am sure, are your many friends," rejoined the lady.

"Amongst whom I trust I may reckon Mrs. Kynaston," said Slade.

"None truer, you know it," exclaimed Kate, extending her hand, and flashing a coquettish look at him from under her dark eyelashes, that might have provoked most men to philandering, if not to more passionate love-making. But

Gilbert Slade's heart was steeled. Not only was he wholly devoted to another woman, but he held that Mrs. Kynaston was the originator of the report of Lettie's engagement, and had so caused him months of unhappiness.

"It is very kind of you to say so," he replied, as he took her hand and raised it to his lips; "we all like to think there is some one who will miss us when we are gone."

"Yes; and I for one shall miss you very much. I have missed you so much during the long and dreary winter," and again it was impossible for any man to mistake the challenge held forth to him.

"I am sorry," he replied, "that I was unable to make my way into North Lincolnshire, but Charlie Devereux's smash knocked that little scheme on the head. By the way, I had hoped to have seen his sister married before I sailed; I suppose the wedding will take place before long, now."

"I should imagine so," replied Mrs. Kynaston, a little shortly. Was this man adamant, that he should reply to such an opening that she had vouchsafed him by talking of another woman's marriage? "However, I have not seen Miss Devereux since the winter, and don't think she has arrived in town as yet; but never mind Lettie, tell me all about yourself. When do you go, and where are you going?"

"I have told you already all I know about it; further than that, the Madras Presidency is our destination."

"It's always the same," replied Kate, pettishly. "It is never any use making friends with a soldier; all my favourites invariably get sent on foreign service."

Strictly speaking, Mrs. Kynaston's charms, aided by her husband's weakness for play, had made foreign service a necessary change for more than one of her military admirers. Still, in this case no such sin could be laid against her. Gilbert Slade's acquaintance with Dick Kynaston was of the slightest; the Major had never invited him to touch either card or cue; and as we know, too, even in Charlie's case, Kate had told her husband outright that he must be allowed to pass scatheless.

"It's very good of you to class me in that category," he

said slowly at length. "It is odd, though, as an intimate friend of Miss Devereux's, that you should have fallen into the mistake of believing her to be engaged to Furzedon."

She felt that her lie was detected; but it was little likely that a woman like Mrs. Kynaston would be put out of countenance by a trifle like that. "Oh dear!" she said pettishly, "what have I to do with Miss Devereux's engagements? I know she was; it's quite likely she isn't now. Girls of her age are quite capable of changing their mind."

"I don't think she has changed her mind," replied Bertie. "I don't think a girl like Miss Devereux would be long making up her mind about a man like Furzedon."

"And pray what do you know against Mr. Furzedon?"

"I know," replied Bertie, sternly, "what I presume you know also, at all events you do if you are in your husband's confidence; you know his history, and you know the *exposé* that threatens him, and yet, knowing all this, you have never warned your intimate friend of the character of the man whom you supposed to be her *fiancée*."

"I don't understand to what you allude, Mr. Slade," replied the lady, now thoroughly angry. "If you are desirous of discussing Miss Devereux's affairs you had much better talk them over with her. I am very likely misinformed about them."

"Perhaps so," said Gilbert; "at all events I am quite sure you have been very much misinformed about Mr. Furzedon. If your husband has not enlightened you, I can only apologise for what I have said. The matter will be a public scandal shortly, and then you will understand what I mean. Good-bye."

Mrs. Kynaston swept him a stately bow, and resolutely ignored the hand he held out to her. Another minute and Gilbert was gone—not quite the parting this that Mrs. Kynaston had pictured to herself; and as she paced the room in her passion once again did Kate Kynaston vow that Bertie Slade should never wed Lettice Devereux if she could prevent it.

It was in a very happy frame of mind that Bertie sat down to dinner with his uncle at the Thermopolium; but still it cannot be said that he was overflowing with kindli-

ness to all humanity. For once the attractive Mrs. Kynaston had most thoroughly missed her mark, and far from subduing Gilbert had simply aroused a feeling of angry vindictiveness in his nature. It was not that he would have said a word, or stirred a finger towards her woe, but he most assuredly would have felt little sympathy at any social discomfiture that might await her. He was not of a very soft or impressionable nature, and he did consider, as we know rightly, that she had occasioned him much unhappiness by the rumour of which she was the originator.

"Well, Bertie," said Major Braddock, as, having finished his soup, he raised a glass of sherry to his lips, "so the old regiment is going to take a turn in the East. Good heavens!" he continued, putting his glass hastily down, "look here, waiter, send the wine butler here at once. How dare you bring that sherry to me, Stephens?" he exclaimed, as that functionary made his appearance. "It might have done for some of the very young gentlemen, but not for me; it's corked; smell it."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir," replied Stephens; "I decanted it myself, and I detected nothing wrong with it."

"Then you're not fit for your situation," retorted the Major sternly. "Change it at once."

"Certainly, sir;" and murmuring "I am always very particular about your wine, Major Braddock," Stephens retreated meekly.

"It's very, very slightly touched," said Bertie.

"I know that," rejoined the Major, "and there are plenty of men in the club who wouldn't have detected it was touched at all, but Stephens ought to know better than to try it on me."

Gilbert thought that he himself would probably have been one of those who would have not detected it had he been dining by himself, but he knew better than to interfere with his *gourmet* uncle until he had been pacified by a glass of sherry to which even he could take no exception.

"Well," said the Major, "India is a place to see, and your getting your troop just before going out makes it worth your while. A captain really draws a decent income out there; after two or three years, if you don't like it,

we shall no doubt be able to manage an exchange home for you."

"Thanks," replied Gilbert, "but I shall be home before that, I think. I'm as good as engaged to be married."

"The deuce you are," replied Major Braddock; "and who to, pray?"

"To Miss Devereux, Charlie's only sister."

"Ah! a very pretty girl, I've heard your Uncle Norman say; but I say, Bertie, I trust she hasn't got her brother's talent for getting through money, or you will be clean broke before a couple of years are out."

"I think there is no fear of that," replied Gilbert, laughing. "I must go out, you see, but as, for a wonder, we don't happen to have any war upon our hands, there will be no trouble about getting home again."

"Well, I always think soldiers are better unmarried," rejoined the Major; "still, when you've got your troop, I always said you had a right to please yourself. I can only sincerely trust you will be happy. I know a little about old Devereux's affairs from looking after his son's. That girl will come into a comfortable little bit of money some day." And then the conversation turned into other channels chiefly bearing on the regiment, and which have no bearing on this history. Once only did Gilbert revert to the Devereux family, and then it was to ask if any steps had been taken about Charlie's difficulties. The Major briefly gave him an account of his interview with Jordan & Co. "The knowledge of who Jordan & Co. actually are is a trump card in our hands, for, sooner than face a court of law, I have not the slightest doubt Mr. Furzedon will abandon all claims to usurious interest."

XLIII.—"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE."

GILBERT SLADE made his appearance in Onslow Gardens a good half-hour before the luncheon hour; and Mrs. Connop, who hardly needed the hint that her niece vouchsafed her, had discreetly left the drawing-room

to Miss Devereux's sole occupation. If Gilbert had been somewhat vacillating yesterday, he came very directly to the point to-day.

"You know what I have come for, Lettice. I have come to say plainly what I virtually said yesterday, and can only trust that, in my joy at finding you free, I did not read your feelings wrongly. Will you marry me? I love you very dearly, and have done, I believe, ever since I first knew you; but it wasn't until I heard that lying rumour that I discovered how very much you were to me. Can you like me well enough to say 'Yes?'"

Miss Devereux hesitated only for a moment, then frankly stretched out her hand, and said simply, "Yes, I will be your wife." An answer to which the victor at once replied by seizing the spoils of war, and pressing his lips to hers.

Then Miss Devereux sat demurely down, and motioned him to a seat by her side; and the conversation became, although extremely interesting to themselves, one that would read insufferably dull upon paper. There are some things best left to the imagination; and it is a question whether our own experiences don't suggest more to us than all books can tell. I don't think, beyond the fact that their marriage could not take place for some little time, they gave much heed to future arrangements, which was, perhaps, as well, as it is difficult to say what changes a few months may make in one's plans.

When Mrs. Connop came into the room, Gilbert lost no time in telling her of Lettie's promise to be his wife. "Of course," he said, diplomatically, "there are yourself and her father and mother to be consulted. As far as I am concerned, I am my own master. My parents are both dead, but I told my uncle, Major Braddock, about it last night ——"

"How could you," interrupted Lettice, laughing; "what dreadful audacity! You couldn't be sure I should say 'Yes.'"

"Pray don't think you were compromised," rejoined Gilbert, gaily. "I only told him what I intended to do; that I had almost as good as asked you, and that I had hopes of a favourable answer. Well, Mrs. Connop, you

know Uncle Bob is a good sort; you know how he stood to Charlie. Well, he wished me joy, and I feel quite sure my Uncle Norman—he has seen you, remember, Lettice—will say the same in his own way. I only trust, Mrs. Connop, you can say the same on your side."

"My dear Mr. Slade," replied that lady, in quite a little flutter of pleasure and excitement, "you have both my most hearty good wishes, and I shall be only too charmed to welcome you as a nephew. I cannot, of course, answer for my brother; but I don't think it is likely that he will not be equally pleased to receive you into the family."

"Thank you," replied Bertie, quietly, "I always felt I could rely upon you, and I hope I have a satisfactory story to tell to Mr. Devereux."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it; but now, young people, do come to lunch, you may not have time to be hungry, but I both have and am."

A very merry party was that in the dining-room that afternoon. Mrs. Connop insisted that the occasion required a bottle of champagne; and, let devotees of the Blue Ribbon League rave as they will, that does impart a liveliness to conversation.

Things were discussed in a much more business-like way under the auspices of Mrs. Connop than they had been by the young couple in the drawing-room. And that Gilbert should go out to India and return within a year for the wedding was definitely settled.

"Stop, I tell you what, Mrs. Connop," suddenly exclaimed Bertie, "I've got an idea. I must go back to York, because there's such a deuce of a lot to do, and, though the chief is as good as gold about leave, it stands to reason the work must be done. Now I shall see awfully little of Lettice before I sail; if you wouldn't mind it you would be real good-natured, and if Mr. Devereux says it's all right, you might run down to Portsmouth and see us off."

"My goodness, Mr. Slade, that is rather a startling proposal. I don't think I quite see my way to that."

"It's quite easy, I assure you; Major Braddock is sure to come down, and I am sure would be only too

pleased to take charge of you. I'll take very good care that you get a line from him volunteering his services; and don't be afraid, Lettice, you'll be awfully well taken care of, as far as eating and drinking goes, while you're under his charge."

Miss Devereux and her aunt were both too well aware of the Major's pet weakness not to smile at this recommendation, and Mrs. Connop at length was induced to say "she would think it over, and, if possible, run down to see the last of him."

"Amuse you, I am sure, Mrs. Connop," said Gilbert; "a rather strange mixture are the good-byes on those occasions. If some of them are made with laughter and toast-drinking there are others made with tears and broken words. However, our good-bye is not likely to be of that sort; we are not going campaigning, and there is nothing to prevent our friends giving us a real cheery God-speed."

By the time this was satisfactorily arranged Gilbert discovered that it was time for him to go. He had two or three things yet to arrange before leaving town, so he bade his *fiancée* a hasty adieu, shook hands heartily with Mrs. Connop, dashed down stairs, and jumped into the first hansom he came across.

Her very unsatisfactory interview with Gilbert Slade had aroused all Mrs. Kynaston's energies. It was possible that Miss Devereux was in town, although she had not as yet heard it, but Mrs. Kynaston determined that that was a point she would lose no time in clearing up, and with this object the next day she drove down to Onslow Gardens to call upon Mrs. Connop, and arrived there a bare half-hour after Gilbert had left the house. She was not surprised to find in answer to her inquiries that Miss Devereux was in town. Thinking the whole thing over, she had felt pretty certain, not only that she must be, but that Gilbert had seen her, and an understanding of some sort had been arrived at between the pair. Both ladies she was informed were at home, and she accordingly followed the servant upstairs.

Persistent believer as she had always affected to be in Miss Devereux's engagement to Furzedon, yet it had never

occurred to Lettie to suspect Kate of having industriously set about the rumour, and therefore she was received with great cordiality. Mrs. Connop had never quite liked Mrs. Kynaston, but she was so elated by the event of the morning that she would have welcomed any one warmly; while, as for Lettie, she was only too pleased to feel that it was now in her power to convince her friend of the absurdity of the idea of her ever marrying Mr. Furzedon.

"I have been barely in town a week," said Lettie, in answer to Mrs. Kynaston's reproaches of not acquainting her with her own arrival. "I should have been round to see you in a day or two, but it was very nice of you to call to-day. You are always speculating on my marriage. Well, I have a bit of news for you. I am really engaged."

Mrs. Kynaston paused for a moment before she replied. Although expecting something of the sort, she was not prepared for an open avowal of the engagement. It was with difficulty she preserved her composure, as she replied, "Pray accept my congratulations, and don't be surprised at my not asking the name of the happy man. He came down to take a sentimental leave of me yesterday afternoon, and I have no doubt was engaged in paying a round of such visits. I pretty well gathered how his leave-taking here had terminated."

Lettie started as if she had been stung; she had had her tiffs with Kate Kynaston, no doubt, but she did regard her as her most intimate friend, and had expected her congratulations would be both honest and thorough, but there was no mistaking the half-sneer in Mrs. Kynaston's speech, nor could any one fail to notice the cold half-mocking tones in which the conventional words were spoken. Mrs. Kynaston was a good actress, but for once in her life the blow had been too severe, and for the moment she had involuntarily dropped the mask. She repented almost as soon as the words had passed her lips, but for the minute she could not for the life of her have said otherwise.

"I don't think Mr. Slade had time to pay quite as many calls as you suggest, nor even if he did say good-bye to a few of his friends do I suppose his partings were quite of the character you describe."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Connop, sharply, "Lettie is a very lucky girl. Mr. Slade will get his troop almost immediately, and it will all do very nicely; at all events, we are very pleased with it, are we not, Lettie?"

"And with good reason," cried Mrs. Kynaston, who had by this time quite recovered herself. "I congratulate you with all my heart, Lettie; though," she continued, with a comical little grimace and a shrug of her shoulders, "it is rather hard to have one of one's pet admirers taken from one in this fashion."

"I can't call to mind ever figuring quite in that way as regards you," replied Miss Devereux.

"Now, don't be touchy, Lettie," said Mrs. Kynaston, laughing. "It's only my way, you know; besides, he is formally declared your property now, though I am afraid you will see but little of him before he sails."

"We are to go down to Portsmouth and see the last of him," said Mrs. Connop. "He was always a great favourite of mine, and as he says, 'this is only saying good-bye for a few months,' and there is no fighting going on, so we've no cause to feel anxious about him."

"All very nice," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, "but I must be going now. Good-bye, Lettie, I am sure I wish you every happiness, and you mustn't begrudge Mr. Slade having come to say good-bye to me. I am an old friend of his, you know. Good-bye, Mrs. Connop, early days for her to be jealous, isn't it?" and with a gay laugh Mrs. Kynaston sailed out of the room.

"And I thought that woman my friend!" exclaimed Lettie. "Did you ever hear anything like her, aunt? her congratulations were a mere mockery. Jealous! no, I'm not that; but Kate was doing, and would do, her very best to make me so, if she only had the opportunity."

"I never did like her," replied Mrs. Connop, "but as for the jealousy, my dear, it was all on her side. She is very much put out at your engagement, depend upon it."

Mrs. Kynaston had been unable to avoid betraying herself, though she would fain have done otherwise. She was too angry with the affianced pair to listen to the announcement of their happiness with patience. The rejection of

her precious spikenard is a sore trial for any woman's temper, but the full measure of her wrath is sure to be reserved for that one of her sisters who brought such discomfiture about.

The brief interval soon slips away, and the gallant —th are in all the turmoil that the order for foreign service invariably evolves. The sale of their horses was, as is always the case, the worst ever known. Who cares to buy hunters at the end of the hunting season? As young Sparshot pithily remarked, "They would not have lost much more, and it would have been far more graceful to have shot the lot in the barrack-yard, and sent them over to the kennels to feed the hounds they had followed so well." Unsatisfied creditors thronged the barrack-yard, excessively anxious for the settlement of their little accounts, or at least some security for them, occasioning much care and anxiety to those gay soldiers who had lived up to the traditional maxim, and "spent half a crown out of sixpence a day." It is ever so; and, when great military authorities tell you that the army is ready for active service to the last buckle and gaiter-strap, I fear the officer's private affairs are rarely taken into consideration. However, all these little difficulties are over at last, the sickly men have been cast by the doctors, the depôt has been formed, and, leaving this latter behind them, the service strength of the regiment was duly trained down to Portsmouth.

That there should be no particular enthusiasm about their embarkation was but natural. They were not going out to take part in a big fight, nor were bands ringing out the spirit-stirring melodies which such occasions invariably give rise to; but for all that there are always plenty of people who flock to see one of our British regiments embark, and start them on their voyage with a ringing cheer.

Upon arrival at Portsmouth the —th marched to the dockyard, where the *Semiramis* was lying alongside the quay. The gigantic steamship speedily engulfed them between her capacious decks, and then Gilbert had time to look round for those who had come to see him off. He had waved his hand to Lettie and her escort as he marched his troop on board, but as soon as the men had settled

down he and several of his brother officers rushed ashore to welcome the friends who had come to see them off.

"Ah! Bertie, my boy," exclaimed the Major, "glad to see they are sending you out like a gentleman. None of your beastly little tubs, but a slashing big ship. They tell me you sail at day-break?"

"Yes, that is so," replied Gilbert; "but come on board now, Mrs. Connop, ladies always like looking round a ship, and there is a sort of nondescript meal will take place in the saloon within an hour."

"Yes," said Miss Devereux, "I should like to do that. Do you know the other day you quite forgot to tell me how Charlie's business was getting on."

"So I did," replied Gilbert; "but you at all events must allow it was excusable."

"Well, never mind now. I asked Major Braddock about them as we came down, and he says they will be arranged before very long. Father will have to pay a good bit of money for him; but it's a great thing that he hadn't to leave the army."

"Yes," replied Gilbert; but here the conversation was interrupted by Major Braddock, who exclaimed, "I am sorry to say we shall have to cut our leave-taking very short. The captain has just told me, Bertie, that, though you don't what is called sail till daybreak, he is going to get his ship out of harbour at once, and anchor for the night in the open water." And here the warning cry of "All strangers for shore, please," smote upon their ears.

There is always a shade of sadness in saying good-bye on such occasions, and I for one hold that the "sweet agony of parting" should never be unduly prolonged. Gilbert shook hands with Mrs. Connop and his uncle, clasped Lettie in his arms, kissed her warmly, and whispered into her ear, "Don't forget to write constantly, dearest," and then handed her over to the Major's charge. She stole her hand once more into his as she murmured, "God for ever bless you, dearest," and leaving a small parcel in his palm tripped hurriedly across the gangway.

When Gilbert unfolded his prize a little later it contained a gold locket with the monogram of "L. D." upon one side, while within was coiled a lock of Lettie's chestnut tresses.

XLIV.—HOBSON RECOVERS THE TRAIL.

WHEN Charlie Devereux came to himself, he found himself being borne along in a rude palanquin, the property of the grim old Rohilla who had cut him down. He was dizzy, confused, and his head still swam a good deal from the sabre-stroke, the force of which, luckily for him, had been considerably broken by his helmet. He had lost a good deal of blood, but his head had been bound up for him roughly in a damp cloth. As soon as he could collect his faculties sufficiently he began to wonder what he had been spared for, and with the remembrance of that scene by the roadside he could not but fear that it would have been better for him had he been slain outright. Soon he perceived that there was an animated discussion going on between two men, who were mounted on very good horses, and evidently men of note amongst the robbers. One he recognised at once; it was the dacoit chief to whom he had been opposed, against whom he had stood foot to foot and sabre to sabre, with what dire results we have seen. The other was a little wiry man of middle height, and a countenance somewhat striking. You were puzzled at first to know what it was repelled you in it; the man was well-favoured enough, but his fellows seldom saw him for the first time without his producing an uneasy feeling in their minds; but at last it dawned upon you, it was the cruel, restless eyes. That his companion paid him considerable deference was apparent, but that it was Shere Ali himself Charlie was not aware until somewhat later. Could he but have overheard the tenor of their conversation it would not have done much to comfort him as regarded his present position.

"You were wrong, Hassam, to spare this dog of a

Feringee. Do you suppose this one life would save our necks if we fell into their hands? No! depend upon it, our lives are forfeited if ever they trap us."

"But I don't counsel that his life should be spared altogether. For the present, yes, because we want some information from him. The pursuit of us has thickened, and there are now many more parties of the Feringees scouring the country than there used to be."

"True, and this lot behind us, in spite of the warm reception we gave them, are by no means done with. We ought to have eaten them up this morning."

"True," replied the Rohilla, "but these children of Sheitan are obstinate as pigs, and moreover love fighting."

"You are right, Hassam, we will make the sahib tell us all we want to know as soon as he has a little recovered himself."

"And if he refuses to speak?" said the Rohilla interrogatively.

"It will be the worse for him," retorted Shere Ali. "We have ways to make men open their mouths he little wots of."

Hobson's determined pursuit, however, left Shere Ali small leisure for indulging his peculiar methods of questioning a prisoner. If the dacoits halted for long, Hobson was sure to disturb them, and though, in consequence of their great superiority of numbers, he was cautious in his attacks, still he never failed to attack, and after a sharp skirmish Shere Ali and his followers were always again rapidly retreating. It was in vain the dacoit chief endeavoured to urge on his band to overwhelm their relentless foe. It was useless. The robbers, although they behaved well enough in a skirmish, could not be brought to face the Feringees in real earnest. The pursuit had now endured something like forty-eight hours, and, as Hobson recognised, could not much longer be maintained. Both men and horses were getting utterly used up, and the one ray of hope he had of ultimately capturing Shere Ali lay in the fact that the dacoits he knew must be getting nearly as beat as his own people.

Suddenly he began to suspect his prognostications were

realised. They came to a place where from the main road two smaller tracks diverged through the jungle, and, as the scouts pointed out, from the footprints of the horses it was evident that the robbers here had broken into three parties. It was just what Hobson feared. Despairing of shaking off his persistent pursuit, Shere Ali had commenced to disband his followers. The hunted dacoit was evidently afraid to divulge the secret of his lair, and had probably after disbanding his men sought its shelter with but a few of the most trusted. Could he but come up with them now, Hobson thought, his capture would be easier, as he had little doubt his own party far outnumbered that of the robber chief; but which of these three tracks to take? they had no peculiar mark by which to recognise the footprints of his horse from that of any other; it was a sheer toss-up, and after a brief delay Hobson decided to follow on haphazard. Two or three hours more steady riding: the men are nodding in their saddles, the tired horses blundering in their steady jog-trot, when suddenly they emerged from the jungle, on a broad highway which was instantly recognised as the main road from Secunderabad to Nagpore, and which way the party they had followed had taken, whether they had gone up the road towards Nagpore, or down the road towards Secunderabad, there was nothing to show. It was hopeless to carry on the pursuit further; a village could be descried not a mile away, and where there was a village there was sure to be water. Hobson marched his troop as far as the outskirts, and then gave the order to his worn-out men to bivouac for the night.

At daybreak the next morning Hobson was awakened with the news that there were horsemen coming up the road. He received the announcement with but little interest; it was not likely that the dacoits would move for any length of time in any numbers along that road, and he guessed at once that it was only another patrol similar to his own. A glance through his field-glasses at once confirmed this, with the trifling exception that the new-comers were evidently regular cavalry, and not mounted infantry. When they had arrived within a very short distance the officer commanding them rode forward, and, addressing

Hobson, said: "I don't know who I have the pleasure of speaking to, but I presume you are in command of one of the patrols in pursuit of this scoundrel Shere Ali. We are only just out from England, and have been packed off to join in the hunt."

"Ah!" replied the other, wearily. "I've been hunting him for months and months; if I had but come across you twenty-four hours ago."

"Why—did you get news of him?" inquired the new-comer, with interest.

"News of him!" replied Hobson. "I've been at his heels and fighting with him these two days. Four times I've brought him to bay, but his numbers just saved him from destruction, and after a short skirmish he always bolted again."

"Both your men and cattle look as if they had had a gruelling," said the new-comer, as he compared the travel-stained, way-worn appearance of Hobson's band with his own trim-looking troopers.

"Yes," rejoined Hobson. "I drove both my horses and men pretty well to a standstill yesterday. The worst is that crafty devil Shere Ali played his old trick on us to finish up with. He broke up his band into three divisions, each of which followed a different route, and it has ended by our losing all trace of him."

"By Jove, what bad luck!" exclaimed the Dragoon. "I wish to heavens I had come across you a bit sooner. By the way, do you know anything of a great friend of mine, who, like yourself, has been at this game for some months, one Charlie Devereux?"

"Devereux—my God! Yes; he is my subaltern," and Hobson's face became very grave and stern.

"Then I fancy you and I know each other perfectly well by name. I am Gilbert Slade, and, if I mistake not, you are John Hobson?"

"Yes, I've heard plenty about you; poor Charlie never tired of talking ——"

"Why do you say *poor* Charlie?" interrupted Slade, anxiously; "he has not been killed, has he?"

"No, Slade, worse than that has happened to him. I

believe him to be a prisoner of Shere Ali's; and you've probably heard enough of that monster's brutalities to know what that means."

Gilbert's face fell. All that side the country was alive with stories of Shere Ali's sanguinary doings.

"I am of course under your orders," he said at length. "I was told to patrol towards Nagpore, on my own account, until I fell in with some other patrol, and then to take my instructions from the officer commanding."

"Well, you can't do better than halt your men here, and breakfast. I must try and get some information out of these villagers before I move on. The worst of it is this scoundrel has created such a reign of terror that it is difficult to induce the villagers to disclose what they know. Generally, a lavish offer of rupees would suffice to make them betray any dacoit chief, but this Shere Ali has taken such ferocious vengeance on those whom he has detected giving any information about his proceedings that they tremble at the very sound of his name; however, I have sent a sergeant to bring out the khotwal and any other of the leading villagers he thinks might possibly have information,, and I must try if threats and bribery will do anything with them."

Gilbert Slade looked very grave when he heard that Charlie was in the hands of Shere Ali. It would have been a terrible thing to have to write to Lettie, and tell her that her brother had fallen in a skirmish with a gang of dacoits, but it would be too terrible if his death was preceded by the infernal cruelties practised by Asiatic robbers. No, he thought, if their worst anticipations were realised, his family should be at all events spared such knowledge.

It was not long before Sergeant Rivers returned, bringing with him some half-dozen of the leading men of the village, including its khotwal or headman.

"They all swear they know nothing, sir," said the sergeant; "but," he continued, dropping his voice, so that only Hobson and Slade, who was sitting by, could hear him, "here is a huckster among them who, I think, knows something, and might be brought to tell it if you see him alone."

"What makes you think that, Rivers?" inquired his captain.

"Why, when the interpreter had got them all together, and was cross-questioning them, this fellow's little eyes twinkled when he heard that many rupees would be given for any information leading to the capture of Shere Ali. Like the rest of them he swore he knew nothing about him, but he hung about the doorway, and as I came out of the khotwal's house he said in a low tone, 'What would the sahib give to catch the dacoit chief?' I answered at once, one thousand rupees; but he shook his head and muttered, 'Not enough, it is too dangerous,' so I said to myself, I'll just bring you along with me, my man."

"Quite right," rejoined Hobson, "I'll see him in two or three minutes."

"Smart fellow that sergeant!" remarked Slade. "Do you think he is right in his conjecture?"

"Quite likely, he *is* a shrewd fellow; he has been for many years in this country and understands the natives thoroughly—he speaks their tongue too a bit."

The villagers were now brought one by one before Hobson, beginning with their headman, who was sternly informed that Shere Ali had been traced to their immediate vicinity, that there were a thousand rupees for the man whose information led to his capture, that it was useless to pretend that they had no knowledge of him, that the Government had resolved to make a severe example of the first village found sheltering or assisting him, and that he had little doubt they had at all events been guilty of this latter.

One by one they protested by all their gods that they had no knowledge of this Shere Ali, that they loathed his very name, that he spread desolation on all the country round, and that they only hoped his Excellency would speedily deliver them from this wild beast who devoured them. One by one they were dismissed with a recommendation to make their way back to their own village, and a menace that they would live to pay the penalty of their obstinate silence.

"Dogs ye are, and dogs' deaths ye shall die," thundered

Hobson in eastern hyperbole. "Your tongues have defiled the truth, and you know that you have lied in your beards. Away, back to your village, and pray that I burn it not over your heads ere the week be past."

"I say," said Gilbert, as the discomfited villagers, having now permission to depart, slunk down the hill, "you are giving full play to your imagination, aren't you?"

"Yes," rejoined Hobson, laughing, "it's the only way to talk to these beggars. I have no doubt they know perfectly well where Shere Ali has betaken himself, but they are afraid to tell. Their own rulers will not only threaten all I have done, but thoroughly mean it. And I fancy in the early days of the century our own people would have done the same."

"Still," said Gilbert Slade, "you haven't got a bit of information out of them yet. What are you going to do with this last man?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," replied Hobson, "a good deal of all this bombast has been for his special benefit. You see he has been almost within earshot all the time, and has been purposely given the opportunity of speaking to his fellows after I have talked to them. We'll have him up now, and if I don't wring something out of him I must fairly own I'm beat, and the following of Shere Ali will become a mere matter of chance; and yet," he continued, lowering his voice, "there never was such reason that we should follow fast upon his track."

The bunnea or petty trader was now brought before Hobson, and replied to the latter's exordium by the same protestations of ignorance as his fellows, except that he was, if possible, even more profuse in such asseverations. Hobson listened unmoved until he had finished, and then said "Your lies are useless. You have asked what will I give to know where I can lay hands on Shere Ali. Men don't ask what you will give unless they have something to sell. You haggled at the price, and say it is too dangerous."

"My lord has been misinformed," exclaimed the bunnea, trembling with terror.

"I think not: unlucky for you if it is so. You had better listen attentively to what I say. I shall take you

into the jungle with me. If I find Shere Ali you shall have two thousand rupees, and I can safely promise you need never dread his vengeance. If I don't," said Hobson sternly, "I'll leave you in the jungle for the crows to feed upon."

In vain the wretched bunnea prostrated himself at Hobson's feet, while the sweat streamed down his brow from absolute terror,

"Take him away," said the latter sternly, "and let him be closely guarded. We'll march in an hour."

XLV.—FURZEDON LEAVES ENGLAND.

NORMAN SLADE was by no means the man to let the grass grow under his feet in any matter of business, more especially when it came to bringing a criminal to justice, and that criminal one who had cost him a considerable sum of money. No sooner had he got a case against Furzedon complete than he exerted all the interest he possessed amongst the leading men of the Turf to induce them to make the Jockey Club take the matter up, and, averse though that august body were to taking cognisance of an affair that had happened so many months ago, and about which their verdict—whatever it might be—could in reality make now no difference. The thing was done, stakes and bets had all been paid, and nothing they could possibly do could undo the transaction. Let it be never so great a fraud, let it be never so shameful a robbery, nevertheless it was a thing accomplished, it was a fact of the past; and those who had profited by it must keep the gains, and those that had lost must abide by their losses.

Quite true, argued those who had taken up the case, but on the same principle what criminal would ever be brought to justice? The murder is done, the felony committed; the life cannot be restored, nor in most cases the goods recovered! but that is accounted no reason why the perpetrators of either should go scatheless. Then, again, the

Jockey Club sympathies were not much in favour of Mr. William Smith. That gentleman, with his coarse braggart tongue and inebriate habits, was constantly giving great offence and using the grossest language to their officials; except to those pecuniarily interested, his defeat at Epsom was matter of much gratulation. But the persistency of Norman Slade's friends prevailed, and it was at last decided that the case should be duly brought before the Jockey Club at the second Spring Meeting.

But when Slade marshalled his facts, had assembled his witnesses, and due notice was given to Ralph Furzedon of the charges intended to be preferred against him, and an intimation that if he did not disprove them the Jockey Club would have no other course to pursue but to punish such misdeeds to the extent of their power, an answer came back from his solicitor to the effect "that Mr. Furzedon had been suddenly ordered abroad for his health; that there was no chance of his return for some months; and that he must request that all proceedings should be stayed until his client's return; that he felt no doubt of Mr. Furzedon's ability to rebut them, but in the present state of his health it would be impossible to return to England." This was conclusive; in a case of this kind it was useless to proceed against a criminal who not only refused to plead, but was besides beyond the bounds of jurisdiction. Even Norman Slade—though a fierce malediction broke from his lips as he did so—admitted that it was useless to proceed against a man to whom the sentence of the court must be a mere form.

Furzedon calculated on this; if he kept well out of the way, the prosecution against him—so to speak—would be dropped. Even Norman Slade would throw up his brief when he found there was no criminal to place in the dock. Another year and the whole thing would be thoroughly forgotten; he might return to England. And though he felt for a time he must eschew the racecourse, much as he loved it, yet there would be no public scandal. It might have been a little talked about in society, but probably only to a limited extent. Things of that sort were but a few days' wonder, but on his return people would be much

more curious to know where he had been, and what he had been doing, than to recall that unsavoury story concerning him which was current about the time he left.

But, if Norman Slade was bitterly disappointed at Furzedon having slipped through his fingers, there was another upon whom it exercised a perfectly morbid effect. The hatred of years was concentrated in Prance's mind. That thirst for vengeance against the man who rightly or wrongly he accused of the ruin of his home and his life he had looked upon as about to be satiated, and now once again, after all his patience, toil, and trouble, had his enemy proved too clever for him. He quite pestered Norman Slade with his entreaties that he should persevere with the case; it was in vain. Slade told him it was hopeless to think that the Jockey Club would go into such a bygone matter, unless the delinquent could be brought before them. Prance was wild at the idea of being balked of his vengeance, and Norman could not but wonder what wrongs he had received at Furzedon's hands that had provoked such undying enmity. He remembered the man's fierce outburst in the Paddock at Doncaster when he had questioned him about what he expected to get for the information he proffered, and at the last interview he had with the half frenzied man could not but think that he should not count his own life very safe were there a man walking about bearing such deadly enmity towards him.

One point Mr. Furzedon was considerably out in his calculations. The history of his antecedents and misdoings was known to far too many people not to be pretty widely bruited abroad. Through club smoking-rooms and West End drawing-rooms the story of how last year's Derby had been lost was freely canvassed, and that the chief actor in that audacious robbery should have been one who had actually contrived to appear on the outskirts of society tickled society not a little. Young men who found themselves lifted into a temporary importance from the fact that they happened to know Furzedon were cross-examined as to his personal appearance, and as to whether they really did not detect from his manner that he kept a shop. "So shocking you know, and a pawnbroker's shop too!" that

useful but retiring business being regarded in a sinister light by the fashionable world, who believe its dealings to consist chiefly of the receiving and disposing of stolen property.

Mrs. Kynaston, with her usual astuteness, at once made the most of such cards as Fortune put into her hand. She went about posing as a perfect martyr, a sorely-trying woman, whose burden was almost greater than she could bear. "It's terrible, my dear," she would exclaim plaintively to her intimates, "to think that we knew Mr. Furzedon at all, but I am ashamed to say we knew him very well; that's the worst of racing. Dick is so fond of it, and he does pick up such queer acquaintances on the Turf. The first intimation we had of it all was from Mr. Slade; we didn't know him, but he knew that Dick and this dreadful man were mixed up in some racing transactions together, and so he called and told him what he had discovered. I need scarcely say Dick at once told Mr. Furzedon he need never expect to set foot in our house again; but if it is terrible for me, what must it be for poor Miss Devereux? My heart quite bleeds for her, poor girl; she was engaged to him, you know. I suppose it is all off now? Poor Lettie, it is very sad for her."

The result of Mrs. Kynaston's wailings was that the report of Lettie's engagement to Furzedon, which had somewhat died away, was again revived, and it really ran a chance of having the effect that lady designed. No two men could be more thoroughly up in the talk of the town than Gilbert's two uncles. They mixed in very different sets, and neither of them very much affected ladies' society; but there is not much that goes in the London world that is not freely discussed in the club smoking-rooms; and amongst these Major Braddock passed a great deal of his time, while at the chief rendezvous of the magnates of the Turf it was well-known that the latest scandal is invariably served up red-hot. In the ordinary course of events, neither Slade nor Major Braddock would have heard this rumour—the actors in it were not of sufficient importance in society to attract attention to it out of their own immediate circle; but, thanks to the threatened charge against

Furzedon, anything connected with him became of greater interest when, in due time, it came to their ears. Had they not both had some knowledge of Miss Devereux it was very probable that they would have written to Gilbert to urge him to pause before taking to wife a damsel who had transferred her affections with such wondrous facility; but, as it was, they saw no call for interference; and so far Mrs. Kynaston's tattling resulted in nothing more than considerable annoyance to Mrs. Connop, who was constantly goaded to madness by the commiseration expressed by her friends about her niece's disappointment.

Prance, ever brooding over his wrongs, ever hating, ever thinking of this man, who had been his undoing, determined that he must see him, that he must leer at him, flout him with his social downfall. Cunning and astute, he had known that if his vengeance could be carried no further, the utter demolition of Ralph Furzedon's social pedestal would be very bitter to that gentleman, and a thing over which he could gloat with much satisfaction. For years he had hugged the idea to his heart of ruthlessly exposing Furzedon, of letting the world know generally who and what this young gentleman was that it was so cordially receiving to its bosom, to pitilessly expose the family from which he sprang, the way in which he and his progenitors had earned their wealth; but all this was small satisfaction unless he was there to exult over his victim in his downfall. He had waited patiently because he feared that nobody would pay heed to his allegations; and it was not till he had tracked out Furzedon in a great Turf fraud that he deemed he could command a hearing. Well! he had obtained it, and now in the hour of his victory Ralph Furzedon had fled from the consequences of his crime. Still, Prance was aware that if he had not altogether succeeded in publicly exposing Furzedon, yet he had done so quite sufficiently to ruin him socially. There had been plenty of paragraphs in the sporting papers with allusions to the grave charges impending against a young gentleman well known in racing circles. Later paragraphs contained the news that the accused had left the country sooner than face the inquiry; and further paragraphs said it would be

absurd to conceal the name of the delinquent, and therefore published it boldly. But Prance wanted to see this man in his downfall, and exult over him in the hour of his defeat.

A lucky Ascot had put Mr. Prance in funds, and he determined to follow Furzedon abroad, and look at him, as he said to Norman Slade at Doncaster; money was to him as nothing to the luxury of revenge, and it was so; it had become a mania with him; he was quite prepared to exist on the bare necessaries of life if he could only feast his eyes on Furzedon thrust out of all decent society, and driven to associate with a class of Continental adventurers little superior in position to him, Prance. Ha! to see that; to force his way into such a set, and to occasionally indulge in a gibe at the man who had struck him to the ground that night in the Haymarket; ha! ha! that would be worth living for; to keep perpetually wondering how such a well-known Turfite as Mr. Furzedon could be lingering abroad while Doncaster and Newmarket were going on. Ho! ho! what fun that would be. The man was really half crazy on the point of his inveterate animosity to Ralph Furzedon.

But to gratify these amiable instincts it was of course necessary that Mr. Prance should know whither Furzedon had betaken himself, and this was by no means so easy. Furzedon's dependents of all sorts were far too well trained to babble; and again, he was a gentleman who made no more confidants than were absolutely necessary. His valet he had taken with him; the old woman in charge of his chambers doubtless had no knowledge of his address; and, though both at his office in Northumberland Street and at the shop a few streets higher up the Strand, they were sure to be aware of it, yet Prance knew better than to suppose that he should obtain the information he wanted from them. How was he to get at what he wanted? and about this Prance was fairly beat; but he was a man accustomed to burrowing, to tracking and tracing things through dirty by-paths, to obtaining information—ofttimes of very dubious value—in manifold queer ways, and though at fault for the present it was not likely that he would remain so long. **A**

good hater, like a vengeful Indian, may be baffled for the time, but it is difficult to throw him altogether off the trail.

Mr. Prance cogitated over this for some time, and for the life of him could hit upon no solution to the problem. At last an idea struck him. Furzedon's letters were probably addressed in the first instance to the office in Northumberland Street, and from thence sent on to him by his confidential clerk. No sooner had he settled this in his own mind than Prance slipped down to Northumberland Street about the time he knew the office would be closing. He loitered outside until he saw Mr. —, the head clerk, whom he knew perfectly well by sight, come out and walk away. Then he rung at the bell, and the door was opened, as he expected, by the charwoman, who was about to sweep out the office. His covenant with her was short and simple. For a trifling consideration the contents of the wastepaper basket were to be carefully preserved and delivered to him daily.

For some days, carefully though Prance studied the torn papers that the charwoman handed over to him, it was with no result, but the clue was found at last. One morning, as he went carefully through them, he suddenly espied an envelope torn in two addressed to Mr. —, in Furzedon's well-known hand. The postmark on the envelope told him partly what he wanted to know. Furzedon, then, was at Brussels; but it was, of course, possible that he might not be staying there under his own name. If the envelope was torn up it was likely that the letter inside it had been torn up too. He continued his search, and soon discovered that this was the case. What the contents of the letter might be he cared very little about; but, for all that, he put the pieces together, and, as he anticipated, arrived at Furzedon's address. That gentleman's letters were to be forwarded to Henry Jackson, *Poste Restante*, Brussels. This was quite sufficient for Prance; with that clue to go upon he felt quite certain of speedily tracing his man to his harbour of refuge—and without delay the monomaniac started for the Belgian capital.

XLVI.—"LET HIM BE GIVEN TO THE FLIES."

CHARLIE DEVEREUX, meanwhile, who is hurried along by his captors in a manner that taxes his exhausted strength severely, cannot as yet complain of anything worse than being rather roughly treated. He could hardly expect much courtesy from men like his captors, more especially while they were being much harassed in their retreat by his comrades. It was quite clear to him that his life hung upon a thread—not on account of the Rohilla's sabre-stroke, he felt pretty confident he should get over that—but the scowling brows and menacing gestures directed towards him by the dacoits after each of these little skirmishes between themselves and Hobson's troops showed too plainly that his hour might come any minute. In fact it was nothing but the influence of Hassam that had saved his life so far, and to what caprice he owed his intervention Charlie could not possibly conjecture. Jealously guarded, he could see but little of what went on, but the firing told him whenever Hobson and his men came up with their fleet-footed foe.

At last came a hurried halt, and Charlie made out that the robbers had broken up into three parties, that the one with which he remained was apparently under the command of the Rohilla, and what had become of Shere Ali Charlie was unable to ascertain. From this out Devereux heard no more of his own people. They might be still following the robbers for all he knew; but, at all events, their rifles were silent. Their road, as far as he could make out, seemed to grow deeper and deeper into the jungle. Another thing that struck him was, that they were diminishing in numbers, and certainly soon after they broke into three parties they materially relaxed the speed at which they travelled.

His captors showed no disposition to converse with him, and, indeed, as far as he knew, were unable to do so. Charlie had picked up but very little Hindostanee, and except from Hassam he had heard no word of English escape their lips. As for the Rohilla, Devereux suspected

that he could speak English fairly well if he chose: so far he had confined himself to brief inquiries as to whether he suffered much from his wound, and to occasionally rendering some rough assistance in readjusting the bandages. At length they indulged in a halt of much greater duration than ordinary, and from various signs Charlie came to the conclusion that the robbers had now no fear of pursuit, and were besides nearing their destination. Hassam's band had dwindled down now to little over a score—how or when the others had disappeared Devereux did not know, but they had been melting like a snowball ever since the dacoits had broken into three bodies, the fact being that the marauders were dispersing to their own homes, leaving behind them only the faithful few privileged to accompany Shere Ali to his stronghold.

Of all Shere Ali's subordinates there was none he placed more dependence upon than Hassam, and it is doubtful whether any other could have stood between young Devereux and his end but him. Even Hassam knew that he had purchased but a temporary respite for his prisoner, and it was open to question whether that grisly old marauder desired more; though by no means so cruel, he was quite as ruthless as his chief, and held strongly to the creed that the dead tell no tales. He thought that a good deal of the information they wanted ought to be wrung from the young English officer, and that once got, well, it was as easy to give him his passport for another world as not. The difference between the robber-chief and his lieutenant was this, the Rohilla would not hesitate to torture a captive to gain his object, but Shere Ali would torture his victims from sheer cruelty.

Devereux had by this time abandoned his palanquin, and been placed astride on a rough country pony, one of those clever, wiry little "tats," who do a wondrous lot of work upon a minimum of corn. He noticed that they seemed to have plunged deeper into the jungle than ever, the very semblance of a road seemed to have been lost, and their path could only be described now as a mere track. Suddenly they emerged from the jungle upon a species of oasis, upon the far side of which was a singular

group of rocks, and around their base flowed a small water-course, tranquil enough just now, but probably a torrent in the rainy season; beyond the rocks was more jungle. Before crossing this grassy oasis Devereux had time to study this caprice of nature; it looked like a natural citadel, of which the huge rock in the centre might be the key, and its smaller surrounding brethren the outworks. This was the stronghold of Shere Ali. Halting his men for a few minutes just within the verge of the jungle Hassam rode forward and discharged two pistol-shots into the air. Devereux looked on with much curiosity to see the result of the signal, for such it evidently was. Another minute and a single shot was discharged from the group of huge limestone boulders, and then Hassam and his party rode gaily forward.

The stream running in front of the rocks was easily fordable, and, having crossed it, they turned between two of the smaller boulders and ascended the rocky path which led up to the king-stone of this singular group. Devereux noticed that the smaller rocks were honeycombed with caves, partly natural, but many of them had evidently been enlarged by the hand of man. At last they turned through a fissure in the side of the chief rock, which, to Devereux's great astonishment, instead of being solid, was in the centre hollow, after the manner of a tooth. Around this curious platform in the middle were the entrances to several caverns, all of which, though natural to begin with, had evidently been considerably enlarged artificially; in short, the place had been, in years long gone by, a species of Buddhist monastery, now it was the home of the dacoit, and before then, perchance, of the tiger; where his priest had formerly invoked Buddha, now the victims of Shere Ali shrieked their lives out under the tortures this miscreant inflicted under pretext of extorting confessions of hidden hoards which they did not possess.

This natural fortress had evidently been the retreat of the robbers for some time; many of the caves had been turned into store-houses, and some of the larger ones into stables, and it was quite evident to Devereux that, if they had only command of water, a small body of men might

hold out for a considerable time against much superior numbers. Still, that would avail Shere Ali little, let his stronghold be only once discovered; and then Charlie reflected sadly how well its secret had been kept, and how long the dacoit chief had baffled his pursuers. He was thrust into a small cell with a stern intimation from Hassam that if he crossed its threshold without permission he did so at his peril. As far as he could make out, the place at present was occupied only by Hassam's party, and what had become of Shere Ali he was unable to conjecture; but he felt pretty certain that he was not within the citadel. He could see that the robbers maintained in their way a severe discipline, the Rohilla's word was obeyed without question by his strange medley of followers. The ruffianly crew seemed to have been gathered from men of all races common to the Peninsula. There were some whose soldierly bearing gave good grounds for supposing they were among those who, like their leader, had been false to their salt during the past Mutiny, but many of them had probably taken to the road from their youth upwards. Food and water were furnished him with a liberal hand, and, though he was apparently but slightly guarded, Devereux knew that he was jealously watched; moreover, so far as he knew, the only way out of this singular amphitheatre was the narrow path by which they had entered, and two or three of the dacoits armed to the teeth lingered night and day about that. Still, Charlie thought that if any feasible chance of escape presented itself he was bound to attempt it. He could but be killed, and that that would be his fate a little later he had no reason to doubt; in fact it puzzled Charlie why it was that his life was spared so long.

Their first day in the rocks the dacoits seemed determined to compensate themselves for the fatigues of their late rapid march. They gave themselves up, after the manner of their kind, to eating and drinking, sleep and tobacco—usually the sole pleasures left to those who elect to live by preying on their fellows: and the second day they were more on the alert, and Hassam more than once ascended a rough staircase which led to the top of the

great honeycombed rock which formed their shelter. Devereux had gathered, partly from the few words he caught and partly from their gestures, that they were expecting the arrival of their leader; and when the afternoon sun sank low in the heavens the tramp of horses on the narrow path became plainly audible: a few minutes more and Shere Ali, with about a dozen followers, made their appearance on the rocky platform. Devereux was struck with what a very small number of the dacoits had gained their stronghold; he felt sure that they were in much greater force than when he and his comrades first came up with them. It was of course difficult to estimate their numbers in the jungle, but Charlie had believed that there were quite three hundred of them when their first attack was made, which had terminated so disastrously for himself. He did not believe that Hobson's incessant attacks had occasioned such loss as the disproportion between their present and then numbers might have been supposed to indicate. Then he began to speculate upon how Shere Ali's return would affect himself—little doubt, he thought, but what his fate would be speedily determined now; then he wondered whether his comrades were still upon the track of the marauders. He reckoned that Hobson could only have about fifty men with him now, for several he knew fell in that first skirmish; and it was not likely that others had not shared the same fate in the succeeding ones. Shere Ali had between thirty and forty with him, and the natural defences of the place were such, that, even if tracked to his lair, the struggle between him and his assailants would probably be both bloody and protracted.

Devereux was kept but little time in suspense; half an hour after the dacoit chief's arrival in his citadel his cave was entered by some half dozen of the robbers, and he was roughly escorted into the presence of Shere Ali. The bandit's face wore its most savage expression. Hobson's stubborn pursuit had irritated him not a little, and his fury had been thoroughly roused by finding it hopeless to induce his followers to fairly face the hated Feringees. He had led them on himself twice in the most resolute fashion; for, merciless though he was, he possessed the

one attribute of animal courage. But, as it had been in the Mutiny, so it was now; and, in spite of preponderance of numbers, the Asiatic could rarely be induced to face the Englishman hand to hand.

He was sitting at the door of the cave which he retained as his own private residence, surrounded by Hassam and four or five more of his principal lieutenants. A gleam of ferocious exultation flashed across his face, and the savage dark eyes lit up with devilish cruelty as he fixed his gaze upon Devereux.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed at last; "so this is the dog of a Feringee you persuaded me to spare, Hassam. Your arm grows feeble, old friend; your sword was wont to do its work cleaner. Answer me this, Englishman: not as you hope to live, but as you hope to escape agonies that will make you welcome death as a boon and a blessing. How many parties of your hated race are there out in pursuit of me?"

Devereux made no reply.

"Dog, do you hear what I say?"

"A soldier answers no questions put to him by the enemy; and an Englishman knows how to die."

"And an Asiatic knows how to kill. Fool! before the morrow's sun has set you shall pray to your gods for death. Away with him, and let him be given to the flies."

Charlie Devereux was in merciful ignorance of the horrible death to which Shere Ali's ruthless words consigned him; in a trice he was seized, conducted down the narrow pathway, carried some two hundred yards out into the little oasis, on the edge of which the rocky citadel stood. There he was stripped; and then, his captors having driven some short stakes into the ground, they proceeded to bind him hand and foot to the said stakes, the result of their labours being that Devereux was left stretched flat on his back on the ground, with his arms extended after the manner of a man crucified, unable to move hand or foot, and with only the power of slightly turning his head. That done, with a brutal laugh the robbers retreated into their own stronghold.

Devereux speedily began to realise the horrible death to

which the dacoits had consigned him; the sun was almost down, so for the present he was spared the tortures of the fierce glare that must to-morrow shine down upon his up-turned face; but Charlie quickly became aware that the jungle was alive with creeping things, for which his defenceless form had become a playground. The stings, the bites, and the irritation caused by this army of flies, mosquitoes, centipedes, etc., gradually became maddening, and as the night wore on, the fever occasioned by it naturally excited a terrible thirst, a frightful craving for water, than which there is no infliction more hard to bear. With the hours of darkness came the bark of the jackal; and soon Devereux became conscious that several of these creatures were not only at hand, but were stealing cautiously up to him as a subject well worthy of investigation. He could have cried aloud almost in his agony, but he grimly swore the dacoits should not have that satisfaction; and then he realised Shere Ali's threat. He felt that he was strong yet, and that he could look forward to hours of thirst and this frightful irritation before death released him. Every bone in his body seemed to be one prolonged ache, from the enforced inability to shift his position. He felt that the jackals were coming nearer and nearer; they were smelling at his feet; every moment he expected their sharp teeth would meet in his flesh. Suddenly came a sharp yap from one of their number, who was still some little way off. Another second, and they were scuttling away in all directions. What had alarmed them he could not guess, but at all events he was relieved for the present from one of the horrors of his position.

XLVII.—THE ROCKS OF RUGGERBUND.

AT the expiration of the hour bugle and trumpet rang out "boot and saddle;" the mounted infantry and dragoons at once, under Hobson's orders, turning upon the former's previous tracks, once more plunged into the jungle, carrying with them the unhappy bunnea as a captive.

"I am going back," said Hobson, "to the spot where I was beat and lost all trace of Shere Ali. The road there splits into three paths, the one of these three paths that we followed brought us on to the main road; I am convinced that Shere Ali was not with that party. That band, I should imagine, dispersed as soon as it touched the highway. It is little likely that they would have dared travel in the force they were along the main road to Nagpore. Had they turned the Secunderabad way you must have met them."

"Quite true," said Slade, "and I am perfectly sure no such body as half a score has passed us on the road."

Hobson smiled; he had not passed years in hunting Pandies, Rohillas, dacoits, and all such riff-raff for nothing. He had not much faith in these newly-arrived English dragoons when their wits came to be pitted against the subtlety of the Asiatic.

"This leaves us," he continues, "a choice of two roads; which of those two I am to follow depends upon that bunnea's decision. Charlie Devereux's life hangs upon a thread, and by the living God if I arrive too late I'll keep my word with that miserable huckster."

"You surely don't mean that you'll put in force what you threatened?" said Gilbert.

"You are new to these people, Slade. You can't quite understand what we went through during the Mutiny times. And your eyes are hardly open yet to what may be poor Devereux's fate unless our help comes speedily. You don't know, perhaps, so much of this Shere Ali and his doings as we who have been hunting him for months. If I was sure that wretched huckster was withholding from me the information that I require, I would flay him alive. As it is, if he tampers with me in any way he shall never leave that jungle alive, for I'll shoot him with my own hand."

Gilbert said nothing, but he was tortured with the idea of what poor Charlie's fate might be, and recognised at once that his leader was one of those stern determined natures that thoroughly understood his savage foe, and was perfectly competent to cope with him.

The bunnea in the meantime, arrant knave and coward as he was at the bottom, was not quite plunged in that abyss of despair and terror that he pretended. Frightened he was, no doubt. He was of a timid and a cautious nature. Nothing but the greed of gold had led him to open his lips to the extent that he did before Sergeant Rivers. He could not resist asking what was the reward of treachery. He could not help, with all his trading instincts upon him, seeking to know whether what he had got to sell would not fetch a still higher price. He had got his answer; he had found that it would fetch double. It may be still questioned whether he would have had the courage to be tempted even by so high a bait; but the white sahib had peremptorily taken the whole thing out of his hands; he was a prisoner, and threatened with all sorts of pains and penalties if he did not divulge what he knew. On the one hand was the terrible vengeance of Shere Ali, on the other immediate punishment by the white sahib should he refuse to do his bidding. Cunning, though cowardly, the more the bunnea turned the thing over in his own mind, the more convinced he was that the betrayal of Shere Ali tended most to his safety and profit. If he guided the Feringees to the stronghold of the robbers, the result would probably be the capture of the great dacoit chief, and then he thought the band might be so effectually broken up that he would have little to fear from their vengeance. Then again, was he not offered two thousand rupees to point out the way? His mouth watered at the bare idea; yes, decidedly he would speak.

When, upon arrival at the place where the three roads met, Hobson ordered his prisoner to be once more brought before him, and sternly demanded which of those roads led to Shere Ali's place of refuge.

Prostrating himself at Hobson's feet, the bunnea exclaimed, "If my lord will hold to his promise, give me the two thousand rupees he has promised me, and then let me go free, I will tell him all I know."

"You shall have the reward and go free the minute you have led me to Shere Ali's fortress, and I have convinced myself that he is still there; where is he?"

"My lord, the dacoits are concealed in the Rocks of Ruggerbund, and the path to the right will lead you to them."

"The Rocks of Ruggerbund," exclaimed Hobson; "it is odd I never heard of them, and yet I thought I knew all this country well, too."

"They were famous many hundreds of years ago, and it was said many holy men lived in them, but they are little known now."

"Do you think that fellow is speaking the truth?" said Slade.

"Yes. At all events it will be the worst day's work he ever did if he is not; take him to the front, Rivers, and now let us push forward as quick as we can."

After some hours' riding the party arrived at the open plain on the further side of which rose the curious Rocks of Ruggerbund. Hobson instantly ordered a halt under cover of the trees, and then, after surveying the brigand's stronghold through his field-glasses for some minutes, gave orders that men and horses should keep themselves carefully concealed, and above all that there must be no noise.

"That's a very tough nut to crack, Slade," he said, pointing to the rocks, "and Heaven knows how many of his rapsallions that scoundrel Shere Ali has got with him, but we must have it at any cost."

"My fellows are downright wolfish to get a chance," replied Gilbert; "they know that their old officer is in the dacoits' hands, and your men have been enlightening them a little upon the way Shere Ali treats his prisoners."

"Yes," rejoined Hobson, "there's no fear but what they'll come on fast enough when they're wanted. The first question is what is the best chance of saving Devereux's life; the second, how to carry that place with as little loss of life as possible."

"To save Charlie's life is the main thing. I suppose your fear is that they'll murder him the minute they catch sight of us."

"Just so; the sun is all but down, and I think our best chance will be to steal across the open in the dark, and then to rush the rocks at the first glimmer of daybreak."

Anxiously did Slade and Hobson sweep the half-mile of open that separated them from the rocks. They could see the robber sentinel on the summit of the king rock as clearly as possible. Their men were silent, watchful and observant as themselves. They knew that Mr. Devereux's life depended on the rapidity and dexterity of their attack. He had been popular with both corps, and the mounted rifles had in addition a long score of weary marching and counter-marching to reckon up with the human tigers whom they had at last tracked to their lair. The sun dipped below the horizon with that plunge that characterises his setting in the East, and it was night ; lit up as yet only by the fireflies, and sung only by the trumpeting of the mosquito and the chirruping of the innumerable insect tribe. The stars twinkled slowly forth, but there was no moon ; moreover, a declivity of the ground sheltered the doings of the robbers as they emerged from the base of their citadel ; the consequence was that, keenly as the eyes of his friends had scanned the intervening space between them and the Ruggerbund Rocks, they could see nothing of Devereux's so-to-speak crucifixion. There he lay staked to the ground literally within their sight, had it not been for the darkness, Then came the rising of the moon, the bark of the jackal, and the melancholy wail of more than one of the denizens of the jungle, to break the silence of an eastern night.

"We must wait till that confounded moon is down," said Hobson, "and as soon as it is I shall creep across with my men, in skirmishing order, and be as much round this side of those rocks as I can before daybreak. We must both leave a few men behind to take care of the horses ; you'll then bring the main body of your fellows, massed just in rear of my centre. At daybreak you and your men must carry the entrance to the main rock. I shall immediately collect my men together, and follow on to the fort."

"All right !" said Gilbert, quietly. "We shall get in, never fear ; at all events, if my fellows are beaten back you may look upon it I'm past praying for."

A single hand-grip was exchanged between the two men, and then came that tedious business of watching for the

disappearance of the moon, as they had watched for the setting of the sun.

All orders were given, and every man amongst the little command knew exactly what was expected of him. At last the moon waned, and gradually died out. The thick darkness which precedes daybreak covered the plain as Hobson and his men, emerging from the jungle in skirmishing order, crept stealthily across it. Some fifty yards behind their centre came Slade at the head of his dismounted troopers. Slowly they stole forward, and there was no sign that the robbers had any conception of their presence. Suddenly the word was passed in muffled tones up the line that the Captain was wanted.

"What is it, Rivers?" inquired Hobson, in a low tone, as that active non-commissioned officer, who had been leading the skirmishers on the extreme right, at last gained the centre.

"We've found Mr. Devereux, sir," exclaimed Rivers, in an awe-struck whisper.

"Alive?" asked Hobson, anxiously.

"Yes, sir; the devils seem to have treated him shamefully. He's a bit off his head, and a case for the doctors; but —"

"That'll do," interposed Hobson, sharply; "pass the word to halt along the line; now take me to him."

When Hobson came to where his men had discovered Charlie he found his luckless subaltern in a high fever, and wandering in his talk. The soldiers had, of course, at once severed his shameful bonds; but, weak from his previous wound, the misery and tortures of his horrible position had proved too much for him. Fever had come on, and he was now talking wildly and at random. A fierce malediction broke from under Hobson's moustache as he learned in what state Charlie Devereux had been found. "Carry him back at once," he said, "to the shelter of the jungle; and—ha! surely that is the first streak of light. Before the sun is well up we will settle with those hell-hounds inside."

Once more the word was given to advance, when suddenly a shot from the rocks told that they were discovered. "Forward the stormers!" rang out Hobson's voice, in

reply. "Keep your men well in hand, Captain Slade, till you are close up to the rock; and then, good luck to you! Sound the fire bugle," and in another instant a score of rifles rang out that the half-dozen dacoits were visible against the sky-line in the dim gray of the morning.

Slade and his men in the meantime marched rapidly across the short space that intervened between themselves and the fissure in the rock, now plainly visible. They suffered but slightly, for the hot fire kept up by Hobson's sharpshooters prevented the dacoits from effectively using their muskets on the advancing foe.

"Now, lads, follow me!" exclaimed Slade, as, waving his sabre, he dashed up the pathway followed by his troopers, but the wasps' nest was by this time thoroughly aroused, and at the first bend of the road where the path enlarged a little they were confronted by Hassam. Quick as thought Gilbert dashed at the Rohilla, and a fierce and furious *melée* at once occurred between the dacoits and the troopers, sabres flashed and revolvers cracked for a few minutes. At the end of that time Hassam found that he had encountered a more formidable foeman than Charlie Devereux. Young, powerful, and a good swordsman, with the advantages of height and reach, the contest between Slade and the Rohilla was short, and Gilbert passed his sword through the latter's body, just as he felt something like the sear of a hot iron about his own ribs.

At the fall of Hassam the robbers gave way, and Gilbert and his troopers followed close upon them, so as to give them no chance of re-forming, but they soon rallied under the command of another chief, who now suddenly appeared upon the scene. Gilbert, who was under the impression that he had slain Shere Ali when he ran Hassam through the body, was somewhat puzzled at this new apparition, but the English slowly won their way upwards despite the desperate resistance of the dacoits, now led by Shere Ali in person. By this time Slade and his men had fought their way into the little amphitheatre which formed the interior of the king rock, and there a terrible struggle took place between the soldiers and the bandits; looking upon it as hopeless to ask for quarter, they died like rats in a trap, showing their teeth to the last. Shere Ali and some six of

eight of the men were all that were left. Once more Gilbert, his sabre red with carnage, rallies his men for a last charge. As he dashes in at their head a bullet from the robber chief's pistol smashes his sword-arm, which drops useless by his side. Shifting his sabre to his left hand, Gilbert still cheers his men on—suddenly Shere Ali springs back into the mouth of a cave to which he has been driven, and disappears; another minute or two and Slade and his troopers pour into the cave in pursuit of the daring chief whom they now have no doubt is Shere Ali himself. It is difficult at first to penetrate the obscurity of the cave, but when they do it is empty. In vain do they peer and poke their way into the darkest recesses of the cabin, their prey has escaped them, it seems as if the earth has swallowed Shere Ali.

Suddenly a wild English hurrah, followed by a shot or two, breaks upon the morning air. The sounds come from the outside of the rock, and, though not exactly knowing what they mean, Slade trusts that it heralds the capture of the dacoit chief. He had seen nothing of Hobson since he gave him orders to storm the rocks. That sagacious veteran, having much experience of the wiliness of dacoits, had suspected that they had probably an exit from their citadel on the far side. Detaching half his men to Gilbert's support he had at once crept round with the other half to watch the narrow strip of open that lay between the rocks and the jungle on that side; his craftiness was rewarded, for some few minutes after the firing had ceased inside the rock which proclaimed that Slade had overcome the garrison, some bushes parted, and from a fissure which they concealed appeared the robber chief. Discharging his pistols in the face of his foes, the robber made a determined dash for the jungle, but a rifle bullet in the leg stretched him on the ground, and the notorious Shere Ali was at last in the hands of his pursuers.

XLVIII.—PRANCE'S VENGEANCE.

SAM PRANCE, on his arrival in Brussels, had but a vague idea of what form his vengeance was to take. He wanted to find Furzedon; he wanted to taunt him over

his social discomfiture; to jeer at him, and to gloat over his humiliation; to proclaim it as far as possible before those who for the present might be Furzedon's associates: but further than that he had as yet conceived no plan. Brooding over his wrongs had, no doubt, warped the man's mind; he had set his heart upon seeing his enemy thrust off the Turf. His failing to accomplish that end, to which he had striven so hard, had turned his very soul to verjuice. There remained for him now but one thing to do, to avenge himself on the man who had ruined his life, and to taunt him ere consummating that vengeance, as the Indian squaws do the brave that is tied to the stake. The first thing to do was to discover where Furzedon had taken up his abode; and that to a man of Prance's researches was not difficult. It was but to watch the *poste restante* daily. He had a very fair knowledge of Furzedon's habits, and could make a rough guess as to within what hour he would be likely to call for his letters. Two—three days elapsed; but on the third the patient watcher was rewarded: Ralph Furzedon entered the post-office, and after a few minutes emerged again, thrusting his letters into his coat-pocket as he did so. It was easy from thence to follow Furzedon to his own lodgings over a shop in the *Montargis de Cour*; and that point once ascertained Prance felt that he was master of the situation. It was easy for him now to keep watch and ward over Furzedon's outgoings and incomings: to follow him to his favourite restaurant, to trace him to his accustomed haunts, and to choose his own terms for publicly denouncing him as a Turf outlaw, who dare not show his face in England; and from that out—utterly unknown to himself—Furzedon's steps were perpetually dogged by this pale-faced monomaniac. Prance, as such men do, was simply nursing his opportunity; he chuckled to himself at the power he possessed, at the knowledge that he could bring the object of his hatred to shame at any moment; as an epicure dallies with a dainty dish, so did Prance linger over his revenge. The great *exposé* could come but once; he so gloated over the idea that he could not make up his mind to precipitate it. Habited in decent garments, and knowing so well that the truth of what he

had to allege was a thoroughly recognised fact by the majority of the racing world, even if not proven, it never occurred to Prance that it was possible that the word of a nobody like himself might be poohpoohed when put against that of a wealthy man like Furzedon. Nursing his revenge, still chuckling in his heart at the moment when he was to expose the plausible author of his ruin, day by day Prance dogged the heels of his quarry. He had found out the restaurant that Furzedon chiefly affected, and in which he seemed to have established himself as the head of a little clique, and a great authority on all matters connected with "*le Sport*"; and there he decided that he would snatch the mask off the impostor, and let these gentlemen know that the man they bowed down to dared not show his face on Newmarket Heath. Mr. Prance had money in his pocket, and the *Restaurant des Trois Aigles* knew no distinction of persons. As long as you were decently dressed and had napoleons in your pocket, any vacant table was at your disposal. The evening came at last which Mr. Prance had marked out for the discomfiture of his enemy. Strolling in a little before the time at which Furzedon usually dined, he took a table in his immediate vicinity; and then, taking a chair in front of the restaurant, awaited the course of events. He had not to wait long. As he expected, Ralph Furzedon and three or four of his intimates shortly made their appearance; and, entering the restaurant, took their places at the somewhat elaborate table prepared for them. The party were apparently English. At all events their conversation was conducted in that language; and it was quite evident that Furzedon was some one in authority amongst them. Prance averted his face as they moved up the room, and was now sitting with his back to them, so that he had altogether escaped Furzedon's notice.

It was curious how his intense longing to avenge himself on his enemy had mastered his better judgment. He had always felt that for him to denounce Furzedon would be useless; that gentleman would simply laugh at him as the pariah of the betting-ring he was; but the disappointment he had experienced when Furzedon left the country

had churned his hatred up to very madness. He with difficulty contained himself until the *convives* were in the midst of their dinner: he sat trembling with passion, and nervously emptying glass after glass of wine in his excitement. At last he could bear it no longer, and, springing to his feet, exclaimed, "Gentlemen, you don't know the sort of blackguard you've allowed to sit at table with you. That scoundrel," he cried, pointing to Furzedon, "is a horse-poisoner, a man-poisoner, a fellow that, if he had not fled from England, would have been kicked off the Turf. Gentlemen in England don't speak ——" but here the flood of Mr. Prance's eloquence was interrupted by a wine-glass, which was shivered at his forehead; and in another second Furzedon, springing to his feet, peremptorily called upon the waiters to "put that drunken thief out of the room."

By this time the commotion had attracted the attention of the whole room. That the landlord and his servitors should at once take part against the stranger was only natural. Furzedon and his friends were well-known customers, who spent their money lavishly. Bleeding, struggling, asseverating, Mr. Prance speedily found himself thrust into the street, with a strong intimation that any further disturbance on his part would result in his being handed over to the police. Furzedon turned round with an easy smile to his companions, who were all more or less of racing tendencies, and said, "A broken-down welsher, with whom I have a long-standing quarrel. I've had him put out of the Ring on two or three occasions. I don't know what he is doing here; but if he has come over for the races, I can only advise you," he concluded, laughing, "not to bet with him." It need scarcely be said that this incident, if it were possible, still further intensified Prance's animosity: he brooded day and night over his imaginary wrongs, and speedily arrived at the conclusion that his injuries must be avenged by his own right hand. From that out he dogged Furzedon like a shadow; wherever he went Prance, shrinking discreetly from notice, was watching him; he dogged him to his lodgings at night; prowled on his footsteps, whether he went to the opera or to the dinner-table, ever watching his foe with fierce, malignant eyes, waiting pati-

ently within convenient view of the door, when Furzedon disappeared into buildings into which he deemed it inexpedient for him to follow. Norman Slade might well say he shouldn't care to have so vindictive a foe at large were he in Furzedon's place. He was right, for since he had been flung out of the restaurant *Prance was always armed*.

He had quite made up his mind, he was determined to kill Furzedon as soon as a favourable opportunity was vouchsafed him. When a man resolves to slay his fellow, and is utterly reckless of his own life, nothing short of marvellous good fortune can save the doomed victim. He is, perhaps, more at the murderer's mercy in the very centres of civilisation than in the wild plains of Western America, in the desert, or in South Africa. In these latter cases he is ever on his guard against enemies; but in the capitals of Europe one hardly expects to carry one's life in one's hand. But Furzedon was a man of gregarious habits; he was seldom alone, and for some days he unwittingly avoided attack from this circumstance. At length he received a letter from Mr. Sturgeon, desiring instructions about some rather intricate business matters that had just cropped up; and, with a view to thinking them well over, Furzedon lit his cigar, and started for a walk on the outer boulevards.

The pale gray shadow of Thanatos stalks behind us from our cradle, but at what distance it is mercifully not given us to know. Sometimes, when being near at hand, years may elapse before he claims his own. At others when exulting in the full pride of our strength he is at our very heels with upraised hands. Little dreamt Furzedon as he crossed the threshold of his lodgings that bright summer morning that the Destroyer had marked him for his prey, and was rapidly closing in upon him. Prance was as usual on his ceaseless watch, and had followed after his wont on the steps of his foe, more doggedly resolved than ever to make an end of this man at the earliest opportunity, and utterly careless of what the consequences might be to himself. One thing only he hesitated about, he knew that physically Furzedon was the more powerful of the two, and whether really courageous or no he further knew that

At all events Furzedon was not afraid of him. Prance's sole fear was a fiasco. The bare idea that an attempt to kill his enemy might result in such discomfiture as we have seen twice befall him at Furzedon's hands made him wince again. No; there must be no mistake about it this time—a life for a life he was willing to give, but Furzedon must die. Stealthily he kept his victim in view, as he had done scores of times in the last two or three weeks, and for the first time saw him with savage exultation betake his way to the comparative solitude of the boulevards. Furzedon walked moodily along, puffing at his cigar, with his hands behind him, absorbed in thought. He had come out to think, and he was busy at it—no thought of Prance had crossed his mind since the scene at the restaurant; he had never caught sight of him since, and would have scoffed at the idea of such an outcast being able to work him harm.

This opportunity had come at last, and, though not flinching for one moment from his purpose, it seemed to Prance not quite so easy of accomplishment after all. The boulevards, although thinly peopled, were of course not deserted; it was easy to keep Furzedon in view, but at the same time to approach him closely was to run the chance of immediate recognition. He slunk along about fifty paces in the rear, but, tightly as he clutched the pistol within his breast, he never dreamt of risking a shot at that distance.

“Pshaw!” he muttered to himself, “have I not waited days for this chance? have I turned coward? is my nerve failing me? It is time to make an end of this,” and, quickening his pace, Prance rapidly though stealthily drew near his unconscious victim.

Not above a dozen steps behind him now, he drew the pistol from his breast, stopped, and was about to shoot his enemy down from behind, when from sheer accident Furzedon turned suddenly in his walk, and confronted him face to face. For a second Prance hesitated, but Ralph Furzedon, whatever else he might be, was a man of courage and decision. He recognised Prance; he saw the pistol, and took in the situation at a glance. This man meant to kill him. Quick as lightning he dashed in at his foe, determined to close with him, and neutralise if possible the

power of that pistol. Prance hurriedly fired at him, and Furzedon felt that he was hit; the second bullet whistled past him at such close quarters that it was a miracle it only went through his hat instead of his head; and then Furzedon closed with his assailant. He was but slightly wounded, and was far the more powerful man of the two. The struggle between them, if brief, was desperate. The one was battling for his life, the other mad with the lust of revenge; but Prance's pistol-hand was powerless now. Once more, indeed, the revolver cracked harmlessly in the air; and then Furzedon succeeded in wrenching it from his antagonist's hand and throwing it away; but he stuck to his man with the pertinacity of a bull-dog, and in another two or three minutes had borne him backwards, and the pair fell to the ground together—Prance undermost. All the brutal passions of Furzedon's instincts were aroused, and with his clenched fists he rained a shower of blows on the unhappy wretch's countenance, and speedily made it hardly recognisable.

"I've a great mind to kill you, you cowardly hound," he growled, between his set teeth. "I've a right to do it; you did your best to murder me. Don't dare to get up till I tell you." And as he spoke Furzedon rose from the body of his prostrate foe, and, stepping two or three paces back, began to take stock of what damages he had received in the encounter.

Already a small crowd, attracted by the shots, were hurrying to the scene of the conflict. Deeming his foe disarmed, and a little distracted by the ejaculations and questions rapidly addressed to him by the new-comers, Furzedon took his eyes off his assailant, who had by this raised himself to a sitting posture. Suddenly Prance sprang to his feet, and, drawing a knife from his breast, threw himself upon Furzedon, exclaiming with almost a shriek, as he buried his knife twice in Furzedon's chest, "Done my best to kill you; not yet, but I will now." And as Furzedon fell lifeless to the ground, flourished his blood-stained weapon in the face of the horrified spectators, and then, with a burst of maniacal laughter, buried it in his own throat.

CONCLUSION.

THE fray was over, there was nothing now but to reckon up the cost and fruits of victory. The dacoits had died hard, and fought like wild cats in their rocky den, and the state in which Charlie Devereux had been found had not inclined the hearts of the soldiers to mercy. There were marvellously few prisoners, and amongst Slade's troopers the casualties also had been heavy. It had required all Hobson's authority to save Shere Ali's life, and the robber chieftain had good reason to feel little grateful for his preservation; he knew it was forfeited, and thought rightly it would have been as well to make an end of it amidst the Rocks of Ruggerbund, sword in hand, as to be hanged in the face of the multitude, which fate he was well aware was in store for him. The doctor's report too was somewhat serious; he told Hobson that many of the wounded were bad cases, and it was desirable to get them within the shelter of a regular hospital as soon as might be. "Captain Slade," he continued, "will soon be all right, his arm is broken by a pistol-shot, and he has one or two slight flesh wounds. It will be some time before he recovers the use of his sword-arm, but one can feel easy about him. I only wish I could say as much for some of the others."

"What about Mr. Devereux?" asked Hobson anxiously.

"Ah! that's serious," replied the doctor, "it must be a touch and a go with him; he seems weak as a rat from his wound, which has never been properly attended to, and these wretches have driven him into a raging fever to wind up with. It is a question whether he will have strength to pull through that; anyway, the sooner I can get my sick back to the cantonments the better."

Hobson had accomplished his mission, and after giving his men a few hours' rest, and thoroughly ransacking the robbers' stronghold, he started with his prisoners and wounded for the nearest cantonment, where he received much congratulation on his capture of the ferocious bandit, whom a military tribunal shortly relegated to the death he had so well deserved.

Charlie Devereux's battle for life was long and painful. More than once the doctors thought he was gone, and nothing but the most unwearied care and attention snatched him from the very jaws of death. When at last the delirium left him he was so weak, so utterly prostrated in mind and body, that the doctors unhesitatingly agreed there was nothing for it but to send him home.

"Let him go round the Cape," said the medical officer who had principal charge of him. "A long sea-voyage will do more to set him on his legs than anything else," and as Gilbert Slade, though doing well, was still unfit for duty, it was arranged that the two friends should proceed to England together.

"Good-bye, Devereux," said Hobson, as he shook hands with his subaltern. "English air, and especially English beef, will soon put you all to rights. My dream wasn't quite accurate, which I attribute to the fact of my never having seen Shere Ali. It was, however, most unpleasantly near the truth."

"Yes," said Charlie, with a faint smile, "I was destined to be cut down by a dacoit, but whether it was Shere Ali or one of his lieutenants made little difference."

The news of Furzedon's death offered a facility for the arrangement of Charlie Devereux's affairs, which Major Braddock at once took advantage of. Furzedon's heirs had no desire to continue the bill-discounting business, and were only too glad to accept the money due to them, with a reasonable rate of interest. That, although Mrs. Kynaston gave free vent to her malicious tongue, and would have prevented the marriage of Gilbert Slade and Lettie had she been able, it is needless to say; but, for all that, the two were made man and wife a few months after the former landed in England, Charlie Devereux being sufficiently recovered to enact best man on the occasion. The breakfast took place at Mrs. Connop's house; and, as that lady had consulted Major Braddock on the occasion, it was pronounced a great success; that distinguished officer having thrown himself into the affair with great energy, and been at immense pains to see that the champagne was of an unexceptionable brand, and "not that usually kept for wedding breakfasts, my boy."







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